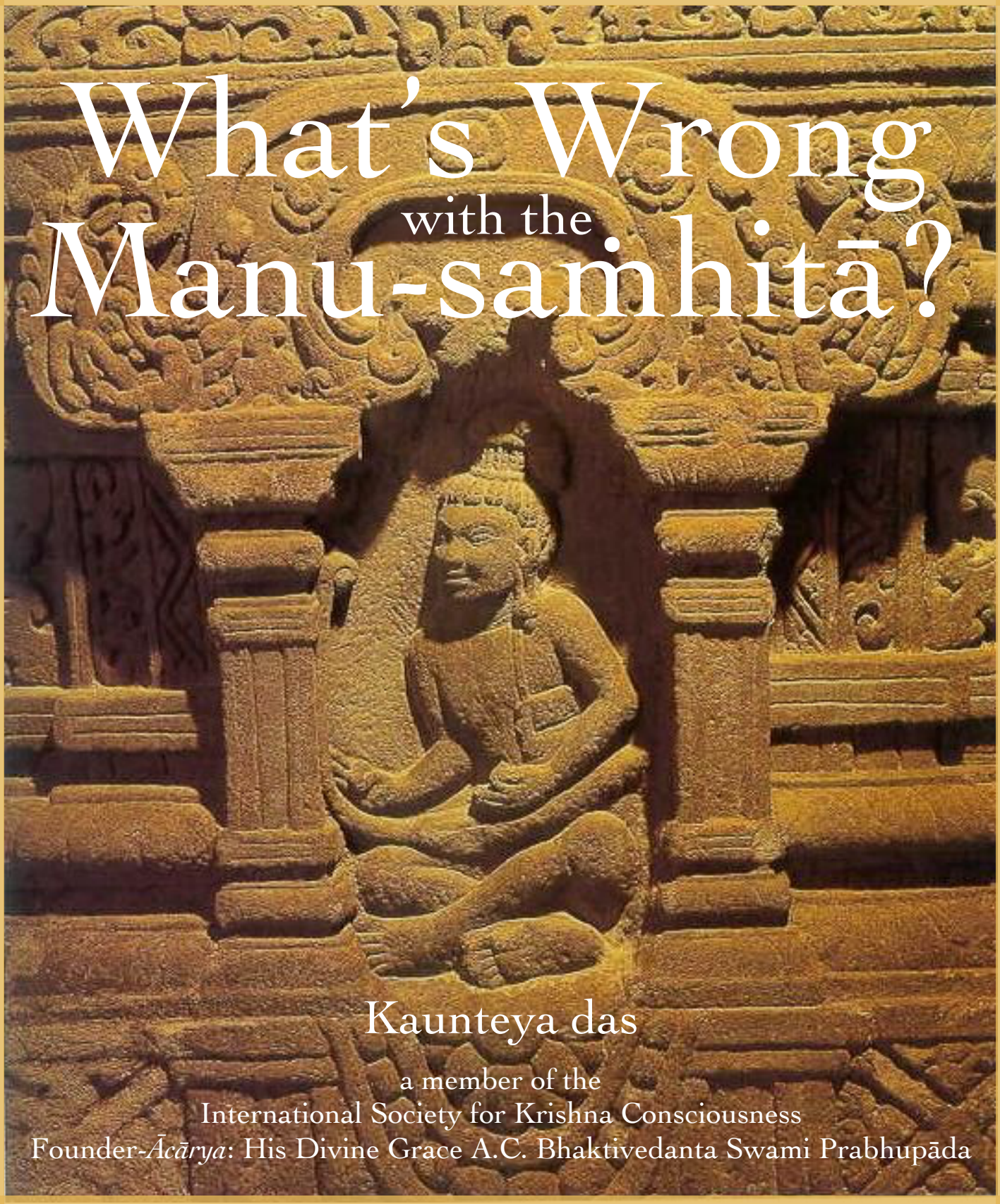
What's Wrong with the Manu-saṁhitā?



Kaunteya das

a member of the
International Society for Krishna Consciousness
Founder-*Ācārya*: His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda

EYE of the STORM

To the devotees fulfilling
Srila Prabhupada's vision
for his Society:
"Krishna Consciousness
Movement is for training
men to be independently
thoughtful"

-Letter to Karandhara, 22 Dec 1972

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On the front and back cover: sculptures in Mỹ Sơn, a cluster of Hindu temples constructed between the 4th and the 13th century in central Vietnam by the kings of Champa, an Indianized kingdom of the Cham people

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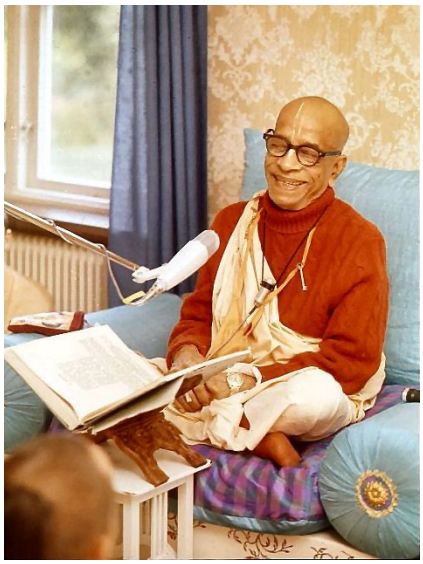
Why this Book?



His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda, Founder-*Ācārya* of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness[1] (ISKCON), at times presented the Manu-samhita as a bona fide scripture, while in other occasions he relativized or even delegitimized its relevance. This impels his followers to try to reconcile his supportive statements with his unflattering ones. For instance, we can't offhandedly dismiss statements such as this one, placed directly in the *Bhagavad-gita*: **"The revealed scriptures, like *Manu-saṁhita* and similar others, are considered the standard books to be followed by human society."** (Bg 3.21, purport) At the same time, as we shall show, we can't just take whatever is now in the Manu-samhita—also known as Manu-smriti and Manava-dharmasastra—as sacrosanct and infallible, as applying to all times, as appropriate to all places, or as relevant to all individuals. Unfortunately, devotees often lock their opinion on a subject based on specific statements by the Founder-*Acarya,* ignoring other things he said. Without having a broader grasp of all he spoke, we remain trapped into a limited, limiting, and even misleading understanding.

This book will show that there are many problems with the text(s) of the Manu-samhita available to us. It will also show that Srila Prabhupada wouldn't want his followers to blindly accept and try to implement whatever is in the book. In fact, a fundamental question we will explore will be: what "Manu-samhita" was Srila Prabhupada talking about? A work composed by Manu millions of years ago or whatever edition circulating now? Another essential question: how much of the presently available text is bona fide and relevant to Vaisnavas or to contemporary humanity? The world at present forcefully—and understandably—rejects and despises many of the Manu-samhita's proclamattions. As spokespersons of the *sampradaya* we have the unenviable responsibility to defend what's relevant and beneficial in the text, while maturely acknowledging what's unacceptable or impracticable. For some devotees, this exploration could represent a wild ride;

[1] Henceforward referred to as "Srila Prabhupada."

possibly a cathartic journey of discovery and (hopefully) re-alignment with the true spirit of the *sampradaya*'s connection with the Manu-samhita. Srila Prabhupada said: **"There are so many things to understand from *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* … So we have to study from all angles of vision, not simply by sentiment."** (Lecture on SB 1.10.2, Mayapur, 17 June 1973) Although here he speaks of the *Bhagavatam*, the same need to study deeply, from various perspectives, **"not simply by sentiment,"** applies to all *sastras,* what to speak of the Manu-samhita, already so controversial among historians, indologists, and other intellectuals, and relativized by Srila Prabhupada in so many ways. A dispassionate analysis of the Manu-samhita is especially urgent and important as some ISKCON members, those affected by neo-*smarta* tendencies, indiscriminately propagandize the book *at the expense* of much more important and relevant sources.

"Sastra Is the Center" – But Some Sastras Are More Central than Others

Srila Prabhupada writes: **"One should accept a thing as genuine by studying the words of saintly people, the spiritual master and *śāstra*. The actual center is *śāstra*, the revealed scripture. If a spiritual master does not speak according to revealed scripture, he is not to be accepted. Similarly, if a saintly person does not speak according to the *śāstra*, he is not a saintly person. *Śāstra* is the center for all."** (CC Madhya, 20.352, purport) Therefore, a sense of deep deference for and veneration of divinely revealed texts is necessary for spiritualists. Submissive reception of sastra is an indispensable element in spiritual emancipation. It's the only portal to supramundane information, *sabda-brahma*, divine, descending sound. As a general statement, a reverential mood to the concept and content of sastra is crucial for advancing in devotional life; nonetheless, we shouldn't make the mistake of equating all sastras. We should always remember that there is *sastra* and *sastra*, in a wide spectrum of importance and relevance. There is a gulf of difference, for instance, between a text like Sri Caitanya-caritamrita—which precisely outlines the *dharma* for this age and reveals the intimate ecstasies of the most merciful *avatara*—and, say, a *sastra* for clouded meat-eaters, detailing the ritual of sacrificing a goat to Goddess Kālī on the dark-moon night, practiced to restrict killing animals and gradually detaching the killer from tasting flesh. Sastras constitute the fundamental basis of Krishna consciousness, and we shouldn't eclipse main sastras of Gaudiya-vaisnavism by promoting an undifferentiated

(mis)understanding of sastra. Accepting anything labeled as "sastra" in an amorphous or gullible way produces several problems:

1. Failing to discriminate among the various categories of *sastra*, some of which only marginally relevant for the followers of Lord Caitanya, can create confusion about priorities and direction. Some texts are, in the words of Srila Prabhupada, **"material *dharma-sastra*,"** (Lecture, 27 Dec 1975) meant to guide pious materialists in their materialistic pursuits of materialistic goals.

2. Some books may have "*sastra*" in the title but aren't sastra at all, not in the sense of divinely revealed texts. Think of the *Niti-śāstra*, for example, a collection of moral codes for civilized life by Canakya Pandit, who, Srila Prabhupada said, **"was not authority in the spiritual sense. He was a politician—moralist, politician. That's all. Worldly man."** (Conversation, Indore, 13 Dec 1970)

3. Fostering interchangeability and non-hierarchization of sastras can cause epistemic short circuiting.

4. A homogeneous, undifferentiated promotion of anything labeled as "sastra" renders devotees more vulnerable to be misled by neo-smartas. Lumping all sastras together is one technique this ISKCON subsect uses to advertise ideas and attitudes contrary to Gaudiya-vaisnavism. Neo-smartas' publicize their elitist, body-based, *apa-sampradaya* agendas by blurring the demarcation lines between different sources. By amalgamating texts of different value abd relevance, they undermine the pure message of *bhakti* that the Gaudiya *acaryas* have so carefully preserved and presented.

If we jump up and down as reckless cheerleaders for the Manu-samhita, we may imagine that we are becoming more "Vedic," while we are in fact propagandizing anti-*bhakti* sentiments. We may think that we are becoming better followers of *varnasrama*, while we are actually assimilating the worst aspects of the hereditary caste system. We may fantasize that we are turning more traditional and more orthodox, while we are actually betraying Caitanya-vaisnavism. We may dream that we are deepening our knowledge, while we are actually slipping into a vortex of superstition and anachronism. We may fancy that we are envisioning a better future for Vaisnavism, while we are actually simply waxing nostalgic for an imaginary past.

This book is a humble attempt at preventing such aberrations.

For whatever you may find valuable in it, the credit goes to my spiritual master, to ISKCON's Founde-*Acarya*, to other enlightened Vaisnavas, and to all the Gaudiya *acaryas* who purely promoted Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu's mood and mission. Whatever faults you will find in this book are entirely due to my own shortcomings.

Enriched by Online Exchanges

A good portion of this book was first produced as a series of Facebook posts. I am enclosing selected comments, sometimes edited for brevity and clarity. I often cite the Facebook name of the commenters; I may use their initiated names when I am aware of them. For comments I consider somewhat embarrassing, I refrain from revealing the author. (Why should one get immortalized for a rushed, foolish remark?) I am also including comments I don't agree with; not only to address the arguments in them, but also to show the variegated tapestry of outlooks we encounter.

Josh Wulf (Sitapati Das), for instance, questioned the whole endeavor: "Is anyone really out here calling for wholesale application of Manu Samhita? This seems like tilting at windmills to me. I could be wrong..." I replied: "In certain environments I witness a systematic drive to promote the book. Possibly nobody would support to use 100% of the text but bringing it again and again to the attention of devotees as a fully authoritative (and pertinent) reference can create (and might have already created) substantial confusion."

Khonika Gope followed up: "Honestly, what kind of confusion are we dealing with here? ... The reality is, not even the government could implement this text as law today, what to speak of a handful of devotees with no legal authority whatsoever ... There are hundreds of ... verses that, if read literally or out of context, simply cannot be applied today." My answer: "That's why I am producing these posts. But the main confusion is not if we should apply 100% of the present text or not (we shouldn't and anyway we couldn't). The issue is one of *pramana*; the issue is that promoting Manu-samhita eclipses the main books of the Gaudiya-vaisnavas, creating a distorted hierarchy of reference. When we introduce a distorted hierarchy of reference, we undermine clear direction and pure orientation; we mix the path of

bhakti with extraneous and deleterious elements. 'Books are the basis,' it is said; wrong books are the wrong basis."

Craving Cognitive Stability

A common feature of some of the Facebook comments was a visceral rejection of deep enquiry into the tradition. After all, the colloquial, universal metaphor of "sacred cows"—intended as ideas, customs, and precepts held to be above scrutiny—comes from India, from our cultural background. Apparently "sacred cows" and "cow protection," (another "sacred cow") merge in the mind of some devotees and become "sacred cows protection," turning into an instinctive resistance to explore potentially controversial aspects. This could pass as a healthy trait, an indication of intrinsic allegiance to our espoused tenets; but, when exaggerated or adopted out of fear, this resistance may reveal a disempowering pattern, a psychological block that, in the name of *faith* curbs honesty, intellectual growth, and realization. When out of control, this tendency of avoiding examination can function as a self-imposed condemnation to unthinking dogmatism.

In many religious communities—including within societies dedicated to Krishna consciousness—there could be a strong inner and social pressure to avoid questioning or testing one's own beliefs too deeply. This often arises from two intertwined human tendencies:

1. **Fear of Doubt**: one may worry that critically examining one's tradition may uncover flaws, inconsistencies, or painful truths. One fears that doubt, once awakened, could grow uncontrollably—like opening a Pandora's box—shaking one's faith and create intolerable inner turmoil. It can even jeopardize one's social standing within the community. It feels safer, emotionally and socially, to remain within the boundaries of commonly accepted (but unexplored) doctrines.

2. **Psychological Need for Cognitive Stability**: human beings have a deep psychological need for a stable, coherent worldview, also known as *cognitive consonance*. The mind tries to keep beliefs harmonious and unchallenged because internal contradiction (dissonance) causes stress and anxiety. Thus, questioning cherished structures—especially spiritual or religious ones—triggers an immediate psychological defense mechanism: "Better not to dig too deep…" The mind prefers certainty over uncertainty, even if that certainty is fragile or partial.

However, paradoxically, in true spiritual traditions, genuine questioning, if done respectfully, prayerfully, and in dialogue with experienced practitioners, is often the doorway to deeper faith, not its destruction. Strong faith is not blind acceptance. Faith can be strengthened through understanding, reflection, and even wrestling with honest doubts. Avoiding exploration may offer a temporary cognitive comfort, but mature *bhakti* and true realization require the courage to face questions, the humility to grow, and the conviction that Krishna and *guru-tattva* can withstand honest inquiry.

I realize that the title and content of this book may result distressing for some devotees, as it urges deeper exploration, instead of unmitigated acceptance of a cherished but unexamined text. Most devotees—frankly speaking—couldn't care less of the Manu-samhita per se. They have never read it, and they will never read it. But they believe in the Manu-samhita's authority due to the occasional legitimizations by Srila Prabhupada. They think, "In the purport to *Bhagavad-gita* 2.21, Srila Prabhupada says that it's **'the lawbook for mankind'**; It must therefore be completely bona fide."

Hmm… not so fast, Prabhu.

I regret whatever discomfort I create by writing about these things. Having said that, those wishing to serve as informed messengers of the tradition must understand that some aspects of the tradition—such as the available versions of the Manu-samhita—are not spotless sources of knowledge that we can unquestionably endorse. I like to

think that Srila Prabhupada would be pleased by this effort at separating the acceptable from the discardable, the beneficial from the deleterious, the relevant from the anachronistic.

What' Wrong with Manu-samhita?

What's Wrong with the Manu-samhita? Part 1: "What's Left of Manu in the Present Version?"

Srila Prabhupada declares: **"Svāyambhuva Manu is the leader of mankind, and he has given a book called *Manu-saṁhitā* to guide human society."** (SB 8.1.16, purport) Svayambhuva Manu is the first of the fourteen Manus in one day of Brahma, each ruling for approximately 300 million human years. According to this calculation therefore, the Manu-samhita has been around, just in this day of Brahmā, for almost two-billion years. **"The present reign is that of Vaivasvata Manu."** Srila Prabhupada explains, **"According to astronomical calculations, we are now in the twenty-eighth *yuga* of Vaivasvata Manu. Each Manu lives for seventy-one *yugas*, and fourteen such Manus rule in one day of Lord Brahmā. We are now in the period of Vaivasvata Manu, the seventh Manu"** (SB 8.13.11, purport) In another purport essential to our discussion, Srila Prabhupada states that the various Manus produced (or re-produced) the Manu-samhita. I find intriguing that, while Srila Prabhupada speaks of *Manus* in the plural, he speaks of the book in the singular: **"The Manus compiled the *Manu-saṁhitā*. The word *saṁhitā* means Vedic knowledge, and *manu* indicates that this knowledge is given by Manu."** (SB 7.8.48, purport) Srila Prabhupada continues: **"The Manus are sometimes incarnations of the Supreme Lord and sometimes empowered living entities. Formerly, many long years ago, Lord Kṛṣṇa instructed the sun-god. The Manus are generally sons of the sun-god.**

Therefore, while speaking to Arjuna about the importance of *Bhagavad-gītā*, Kṛṣṇa said, *imaṁ vivasvate yogaṁ proktavān aham avyayam vivasvān manave prāha*: (Bg 4.1) 'This instruction was given to Vivasvān, the sun-god, who in turn instructed his son Manu.' Manu gave the law known as *Manu-saṁhitā*, which is full of directions based on *varṇa* and *āśrama* concerning how to live as a human being." This seems to indicate that our present Manu also authored a version or re-transmitted the original one. Since each cycle of the four ages—Satya, Tretā, Dvāpara, and Kali—lasts 4,320,000 years, and since we are in the twenty-eighth cycle, our present Manu has been ruling for more than 120 million years; presumably the Manu-samhita has also been around for that long, just in this *manvatara*, the period of Vaivasvata Manu. Let me go on record saying that I do accept the traditional, canonical rendition of the history of the Manu-samhita.

Prestigious Sanskrit scholar Prof. Patrick Olivelle, though, doesn't accept Manu—Svayambhuva Manu, Vaivasvata Manu, or any other Manu—as the real author. He writes: "The eponym 'Manu,' of course, is not the name of the historical author of this text. The name, however, was an astute choice … The clear intent was to make the work more authoritative … The name of this author is unknown, as are any details of his life … The most we can say is that he was a learned Brahmin from somewhere in northern India … [the author] probably came from the class of educated and somewhat conservative Brahmins intent on protecting the rights and privileges of their class."[2] According to Olivelle the present version is datable between the 1st century BCE and the "the first couple of centuries CE."[3] The Manu-samhita would thus be approximately be between 1,800 to 2,100 old.

What to make of it? Our tradition speaks of (at least) 120 million years, while current scholars estimate an age of a couple of thousand years. That's big gap. The first consideration is that there can be a substantial difference between an event, such as the promulgation of the Manu-samhita, and its more recent transmission in physical

[2] *Manu's Codes of Law*, page 19, 20 & 38

[3] *Manu's Codes of Law*, page 37.

format, such as the highly perishable manuscripts available to us. Also with other texts we encounter a variety of opinions on dates. A lot of discussion and controversy took and takes place, for instance, about the dating of the *Mahābhārata*. The tradition talks about some 5,000 years ago, and scholars such Aryabhata have provided compatible dates of around 3100 BC, based on astronomical observations and references within the text; but some 19th century Western scholars dated the *Mahābhārata*'s composition very late, as recent as 400 CE, which would make the book only 1,600-year-old. If such controversies abound regarding the *Mahābhārata*, which the tradition accepts as "only" 5,000-year-old, what to speak of the Manu-samhita which is considered 120 million years old? Is not surprising therefore that, constrained by fallible methods such as the study of existing artifacts and linguistic theories, researchers like Olivelle opine for dates much more recent than what the tradition provides. Artifacts such as manuscripts have a limited "shelf life" and attempting to base on them the genesis and history of a text is bound to produce misleading conclusions, necessarily leaning toward more recent times.

But then, the reader may wonder, why I bring up the opinion of modern scholars if I don't accept them at face value? Because a foundational thesis of this book is that we are dealing with two separate things: an original Manu-samhita (not accessible at present) and the Manu-samhita compiled a couple of thousand years ago and now found in various versions. More specifically: we don't know how much of the original remains in the current available editions, both quantitatively and conceptually. The Indic tradition accepts that what we have is only a fraction of the proto-Manu-samhita, as Prof. Patrick Olivelle dutifully reports: "The *MDh* [*Manava Dharmasastra*, another name for the Manu-samhita] (1.58) presents a textual history

of itself, ascribing the original treatise to the creator [Lord Brahma] … According to the *MDh*, the creator taught this treatise to his son, Manu, and he in turn taught it to his pupils, including Bhrgu. It is Bhrgu who becomes the spokesman and recites the treatise to the gathered seers … At the very beginning of the *Naradasmirti*, it is said that Manu Prajapati created a text containing 1080 chapters and 100,000 verses. Narada abridged it to 12,000 verses; the latter was further abridged by Markandeya, which was further condensed by

Sumati Bhargava to 4,000 verses." Compare that with the present version containing a total of 2,694 verses. Olivelle concludes: "The tradition that the original composition of Manu was subjected to repeated editorial revisions and abridgments appears to have been old."[4] In other words, the traditional view is that a much larger work got gradually abridged from 100,000 to 12,000 verses, and then to 4,000. We are now left with 2,694 stanzas (less than 2.7 percent the size of the original). It's therefore plausible that the author (or compiler) of the present edition really is an unknown *brahmana* writing some twenty or so centuries ago in North India. Possibly he (it's extremely unlikely that it was a *she*) adopted or adapted whatever codes he could access to what he perceived as the jurisprudential, social, and moral needs of his contemporaries. I don't know how pure his motivation was or advanced was his spiritual realization. To what extent was he endeavoring to faithfully represent Manu's ideas or how much, conditioned by caste consciousness, was he trying to preserve or augment the privileges of his class? Some adjustment wouldn't be unexpected, especially considering what the text says about different kinds of humans in different *yugas*:

anye kṛtayuge dharmāstretāyāṃ dvāpare'pare
anye kaliyuge nṝṇāṃ yugahrāsānurūpataḥ

"During the Kṛta-cycle [Satya-yuga], the characteristics of men are of one kind, of different kinds during the Tretā and the Dvāpara, and of yet another kind during the Kali-cycle; this being due to the deterioration of each succeeding Cycle." (Ms 1.85) Humanity's duties, and therefore its jurisprudence, would have to be tweaked accordingly, perhaps even drastically at times. Just in the last few centuries, for instance, humanity has witnessed the radical transformation of political power, with the degradation and virtual disappearance of the royal order, which was a fundamental pillar of the traditional social setup. Srila Prabhupada explains: **"In Vedic literature, the king is considered to be the representative of God. In this age, however, with the corruption of the principles of religion, monarchy decayed and is now finally abolished."** (Bg 10.27) It's therefore not surprising if Indian compilers, living approximately around the time of Christ, attempted to adapt the Manu-samhita to what they considered their judicial and ethical needs. This doesn't *necessarily* make a more recent Manu-samhita less authoritative—if truly representing an authentic expression of its multi-*manvantara* legacy—but, in any case, we may have to conclude that what we have now is, at best, a fragmental revision of the codes promulgated by Manu geological ages ago.

[4] *Manu's Code of Law*, page 18 & 19.

Even assuming the noblest of intentions of the unknown compiler, we may have to resign ourselves to the notion that the present Manu-samhita may at best constitute a derivative byproduct. In that case, it may not simply be a question of discarding as interpolations some verses and sections added in the last seventeen or so centuries; we may have to consider the possibility that *the whole present text* is a subsequent, non-original work, albeit possibly containing some of the original principles and norms. In that case, we could conclude that Svayambhuva or Vaivasvata Manu's Manu-samhita simply doesn't exist anymore, or that there is no way to discern what's left of it through empirical means. In that case, and we could be compelled to relegate that original work to a similar status of other bona fide Vedic texts we know existed, because quoted in other sastras, but not anymore available or accessible.

That, in one sense, would simplify the whole discussion. We could solve the whole issue by declaring: "We believe in the authenticity of the Manu-samhita; but it's a book that doesn't exist anymore. What we have at present is at best an approximation of its original spirit and content by an unknown compiler active a couple of thousands of years ago." I am not suggesting this radical conclusion, as the *acaryas* apparently legitimized (what we may assume being) the 2,000-year-old version, and as, in any case, that version contains some valuable social and moral directions. But the fundamental question about authenticity of the text remains. To what degree the present version of the Manu-samhita is identical and equivalent to the "prototypical" text Srila Prabhupada spoke about?

Perhaps (and this is a hypothetical long shot) we could contemplate the possibility that some form of "Adi-Manu-samhita" may be revealed from time to time to qualified seers, in a similar fashion as the Vedas are cyclically and mystically transmitted to the rishis, the Vedic prophets, who receive illuminations—divine dictations—through supernatural revelations and not by the study of existing texts or through oral traditions. But this idea, I emphasize, represents simply an unsupported and untested possibility, not a suggestion of what might have factually happened.

Premamoya Das offered: "The *Mahābhārata* and the *Bhāgavatam* have shorter versions in the Earth and longer in the heavenly planets. May be this is the situation with the *Manu-samhitā*." Be as it may, even if we could somehow access the original 100,000 verses, it would still be imperative for contemporary thinkers, legislators,

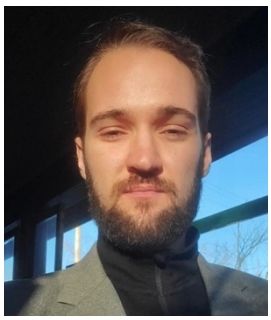
judges, and administrators to decipher and decode them, extracting legal directions relevant to our present situation.

Various, Inconsistent Manuscripts

The presence of different versions complicates matters. Wikipedia explains, quoting Prof. Patrick Olivelle: "Over fifty manuscripts of the *Manusmriti* are now known, but the earliest discovered, most translated and presumed authentic version since the 18th century has been the 'Kolkata (formerly Calcutta) manuscript with Kulluka Bhatta commentary'. Modern scholarship states this presumed authenticity is false, and the various manuscripts of *Manusmriti* discovered in India are inconsistent with each other."[5]

The Arya Samaj's Hijacking Attempt

In my first Facebook post on the subject, I had quoted a study that concluded that "only 1,214 out of the total of 2,865 (about 45%) were found to be authentic, leaving the other 1,471 (about 55%) verses as subsequent interpolations." This was reported by Jai B. P. Sinha, in his "Psycho-Social Analysis of the Indian Mindset."



Balaram Briant

Very scholarly and instructively, Balaram Briant explained that that particular calculation wasn't based on any legitimate methodology: "It's worth pointing out that Sinha's source is the *Vishuddha Manusmriti* edited by Surendra Kumar, which is not a critical edition in any academic sense, but rather a work based on the ideology of the Arya Samaj movement. An academic critical edition determines which verses are interpolated by comparing the various manuscript traditions. If a verse only appears in more recent manuscripts and not older ones, it is judged to be interpolated. This is called 'lower criticism' and is fairly reliable. Early interpolations, which appear in all extant manuscript traditions, are impossible to detect with the same degree of accuracy, but linguistic factors can sometimes be used; for example, if the language of a verse is substantially more recent (with regard to grammatical forms or ideas and terminology) than the period in which the text is thought to originate, then it can sometimes be determined that a verse or section is interpolated despite being present in all manuscripts. This latter method, called 'higher criticism,' is much more subjective. There is only one critical edition of Manu, which is the 2005 edition edited by Patrick Olivelle and published by Oxford

[5] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Manusmriti

University Press. This edition is methodologically sound, so if anyone wants to claim that particular verses are interpolated on objective grounds, they should do so on the basis of that edition."

We shall often refer to that edition. More on Olivelle later. For now let's continue with Balaram Briant's disquisition: "The Arya Samaj edition edited by Surendra Kumar is not an actual critical edition, meaning it does not include a critical apparatus which lists variant readings from the extant manuscripts. Rather, it seems like the methodology involved was basically the following: whatever verses were in-line with the Arya Samaj vision of Hinduism were kept, and whatever verses weren't were rejected. The book is a typical case of revisionist history. Citing it to make a point against Manu-smriti is ironic because in this case, the Arya Samaj revisionism is meant to make Manu more politically correct (or 'Vishuddha') by removing verses that go against the platform of the Arya Samaj reform movement, which (at least at the time of its founding) was a liberal progressive movement meant to establish caste equality, women's education, etc. Actually accepting the 'Vishuddha' version would entail believing that we can know which verses are interpolated and that the criteria for knowing these are the (at the time) progressive values of Dayananda Saraswati in 1875. Since the methodology is bad, though, the book can't be taken very seriously either as a defense or criticism of Manu."

So, let's forget about the Arya Samaj's manipulations, their attempts to hijack the Manu-samhita to make it supportive of their agenda. For those unfamiliar with the Arya Samaj's ideas, Srila Prabhupada considered the group bogus and even **"atheistic."**[6] He said, for instance: **"the so-called Ārya-samāj, they disobey the instruction of Kṛṣṇa."** (Lecture on Bg 2.25, London, 28 Aug 1973) Arya Samaj or not, the fact remains that we are dealing with a scripture tainted by subsequent add-ons. For instance, at one point someone apparently added a whole section on Ganesha!

Insertions of Extraneous Material

One major problem: the interpolations. For the benefit of those who speak English as a second language—like me—let me clarify: 'interpolation' means 'the insertion of something of a different nature into something else.' In other words, passages added later. All sorts of scholars, including Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakura, recognize that the text is corrupted. Balaram Briant usefully reminded us that a degree of

[6] Letter to Sri Sharmaji, 25 Aug 1971.

interpolations—common in dealing with ancient Indian texts—isn't a sufficient criterion to reject or abandon a scripture: "Yes, it's certainly possible to establish that there is some interpolation, if we're willing to accept the academic criteria by which interpolation is determined … What can be—and has been—established is that there are some verses here and there, and sometimes a series of verses in succession, which were interpolated. These passages are marked as excursus in the Olivelle critical edition … The existence of interpolations is only ever a reason to reject the material that has been determined to be interpolated, not the whole text … If you reject any Sanskrit text that has any interpolation whatsoever, you won't be left with many Sanskrit texts—certainly none that are older than a couple hundred years. You would also have to reject *Mahābhārata* and all of the purāṇas, totaling undermining the foundation of our *sampradāya* … As you pointed out in a previous post, it is a mistake to maintain that all scriptures have an equal weight: Jīva Gosvāmī clearly establishes a hierarchy of scripture with *Bhāgavatam* at the top, so we can and should use *Bhāgavatam* to settle conflicts between different texts."

Yes, and in the next sections it will be clear that Srila Prabhupada, although accepting the Manu-samhita as bona fide, robustly relativizes its authority for Vaisnavas. The issue is that for Olivelle *interpolation* simply refers to material added in the last seventeen centuries. The issue, therefore, is more fundamental, as mentioned before: if we take Olivelle's conclusion on the text's antiquity at face value, we may conclude that, in one sense, *the whole available text* is a relatively recent creation. Interpolation, in other words, is a relative term, relative to what we take as the pristine, earliest version of a text. So many ISKCON devotees, for instance, faultily consider the work of the BBT editors as mere interpolations corrupting Srila Prabhupada "original books."[7]

The question remains: what's Left of Svayambhuva Manu in the present version?

Conflicting Attitudes Among Devotees

From my first posting on Manu-samhita, polarized opinions and moods flooded the comments. Some devotee believed that because Srila Prabhupada generally legitimized the Manu-samhita, everything in it must be good and sacrosanct, and

[7] I consider the notion of "original Srila Prabhupada's books" as largely imaginary and mythical. Strictly speaking, the concept would fully apply only to the texts that Srila Prabhupada first brought from India: the three volumes of *First Canto Bhagavatam* and *Easy Journey to Other Planets*. But this is not the time and place to elaborate on this (other) contentious issue.

that we can consider the book "ready to go" for consumption. Others, had a more relativist or even abolitionist approach. They emphasized the problems with the text. Sruti Sagara Das, for instance, appeared worried with the mere notion of quoting it: "I hope Hare Krishna devotees aren't referring to the Manu Samhita ... Manu Samhita is quite harsh and given that a good chunk of it might be 'corrupted' don't see the point of taking instructions from that text. I would rather put my faith on the Goswamis esp. Jiva Goswami who under Lord Chaitanya's and Rupa Goswami's instruction wrote the *Sat Sandarbhas*, one of them to establish the *Srimad Bhagavatam* as the maim scripture for today's age." Rādhe Govinda Dāsa responded with a reasonable counterargument: "Srila Prabhupada favorably speaks of Manu Samhita more than 50 times in his books. And you say you'd rather put your faith in Jiva Gosvami - who also quoted it."

This exchange crystallizes the challenge we face as a Society: how to deal with a book sanctioned as canonical by the *acaryas*, including our Founder-*Acarya*, but which contains so many problematic aspects, as we will gradually see? In her usual poetic, esoteric style, Savie Govender John commented, resonating with the more cautionary slant: "Imagine your spiritual journey like a playlist. The Manu Samhita is like an old, scratchy record with some outdated tracks. The Goswamis' teachings, especially Jiva Goswami's *Sat Sandarbhas*, are like a curated playlist of timeless, soulful songs that resonate with your heart. And the *Srimad Bhagavatam* is like the ultimate soundtrack for your spiritual growth, guiding you towards love, light, and harmony."

In another comment Damodara Dasa (BCS) strongly condemned the *accepting* approach: "Those devotees should just join the Islamic State [I believe he meant ISIS, not just any Islamic state]. Birds of a Feather." Sruti Sagar Prabhu agreed: "yes, there are shocking similarities with this book and other extreme works from other traditions."

Liubomir Turcanu wrote: "Vyasadeva in Bhagavatam and Lord Chaitanya in CC quote verses from the current version of Manu-Samhita: 'This verse appears in the *Manu-saṁhitā* (2.215) and *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* (9.19.17).' CC, Antya, 2.119." I replied: "Therefore we should take that verse as one of the many useful things in the current version." It remains to be seen if the *Bhagavatam* quotes the Manu-samhita or vice versa, but the fact remains: we find that verse in both texts: **"One should not allow oneself to sit on the same seat even with one's own mother,**

sister or daughter, for the senses are so strong that even though one is very advanced in knowledge, he may be attracted by sex." (SB 9.19.17) Obviously, in the Manu-samhita there are many valuable moral and social ideas. Who is denying that?

Liubomir Turcanu brought to our attention an exchange taking place during a morning walk in Mayapur, on 23 Jan 1976:

"**Harikeśa:** In the Manu-saṁhitā also there is many, many rules about what kind of meat to eat.
Prabhupāda: That is gradually. Gradually. If he cannot give up meat-eating, so, 'All right, don't eat cows' flesh. You eat hogs. That's all.' But the real purpose is to stop meat-eating. But that is also under restriction. 'You can eat one goat. Sacrifice it before Goddess Kālī under such and such rules and regulation. Then you take one piece of meat at night.' So any sensible man [would think] 'Why I should undergo such rules and regulation for eating a little piece of meat? Better give it up.' That is the idea."

To which I replied: "Thank you. Another illustration of how little relevance the Manu-samhita has for practicing Gaudiya-vaisnavas." But, of course, some of its moral principles are relevant for everyone, including practicing *bhakti-yogis*. As it sometimes happens, instead of engaging with the arguments presented in the post, some devotees slipped into a "snowball-fight" of quotes, almost as if by sharing enough "Prabhupada saids" on the authenticity of Manu-samhita, the issues with the text would magically disappear. One devotee was particularly insistent in that quest. He started by quoting a purport in the Gita: "**'The revealed scriptures, like *Manu-samhita* and similar others, are considered the standard books to be followed by human society. Thus the leader's teaching should be based on the principles of such standard *sastras*.'** (*Bhagavad-gita As It Is* 3.21, purport)."

I replied: "Yes, and you, as an honest Vaisnava, will recognize that I never said that there are no authentic verses left in Manu-samhita."

He kept piling up "Prabhupada saids," such as this one from the *Bhagavatam*: "**'As we learn from the history of the *Mahabharata*, or 'Greater India,' the wives and daughters of the ruling class, the *ksatriyas*, knew the political game, but we never**

find that a woman was given the post of chief executive. This is in accordance with the injunctions of the *Manu-samhita*, but unfortunately the *Manu-samhita* is now being insulted, and the Aryans, the members of Vedic society, cannot do anything. Such is the nature of Kali-yuga.' (*Srimad-Bhagavatam* 10.4.5, purport) So Srila Prabhupada states how the nature of Kali-yuga is such that *Manu-samhita* is insulted."

My reply: "Those who interpolated the text and modified its original intent have contributed immensely to attracting such insults (and to legitimize some of them)."

He responded: "I believe the insults are not the modus operandi of a devotee." Partially agreeing, I answered: "No, 'the modus operandi of a devotee' should be a cool-headed, detached, non-sentimental analysis of the degree of authority of an interpolated text. And that exploration shouldn't be misconstrued as an 'insult.'"

He retorted: "It seems your only argument is that Manu-samhita got heavily interpolated and therefore we shall throw the baby out with the bath water instead of getting the unadulterated edition ... Throwing the baby out with the bath water and giving the dog a bad name so it could be hung doesn't really seem to be the Vaisnava approach."

I responded: "When 'throwing the baby out with the bath water,' at least it's clear what's the baby and what's the bath water. In this case, we don't ever know what's the 'baby' and what's the 'bath water.' But if you want to work to uncover the 'unadulterated edition,' I wish you success. Till then, we need to remain extremely cautious when approaching the text." He replied: "Our *acaryas* quote Manu-samhita. Srila Prabhupada speaks favorably of or quotes Manu Samhita more than 50 times in his books. So instead of slandering that Vedic text I believe it would be more appropriate to try to find the unadulterated edition."

I am not sure what he had in mind by saying that we should "try to find the unadulterated edition." Find it where? How? Perhaps by some kind of Indiana Jones archeological expedition in the Himalayas? If he is talking about a written copy from the beginning of Vaivasvata Manu's rule (some 120-million years ago), how could any manuscript have survived so many geological ages? I wrote him, referring to his exhortation to "find the unadulterated edition": "And perhaps you will lead us in

that pursuit? Till then, I hope you will agree that the authority of the present text remains highly problematic."

He answered: "I thought that as you already meditate on Manu Samhita so much so that you write about it, you could take up that task yourself. Or you can continue quoting Indian pseudo-academic from Arya Samaj and accept him as the authority…"

The reference to the "pseudo-academic from Arya Samaj" was unwarranted, as his bogusness had already been acknowledged. I took that swing as a blow below the belt and as a sign of frustration. I replied: "OK, your feathers are ruffled. Fine. But please try to understand the kernel, the essence of my message: the present text of the Manu-samhita is interpolated (and that's not just according to some 'pseudoacademic from Arya Samaj' but also, for instance, according to Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakura). Since the text is mixed and modified, we need to be extremely cautious when approaching it as 'sastra.' But, please, stay tuned, there is so much more coming."

This kind of tense back-and-forth leaves a bitter taste, especially when, as in this case, it takes place with a devotee I personally know and appreciate. I felt somewhat relieved when Tattvavit Dasa (ACBSP) characterized the exchange as a "Healthy, humorous argument."

A Fuller Picture Needed

As a broader abstraction from the above exchange: sometimes, regardless of the topic, devotees resort to "Prabhupada saids" virtually as their only rationale in arguments. Now, "Prabhupada saids" should be respectfully received; notwithstanding, especially for topics on which he spoke differently at different times, we should analyze all the "Prabhupada saids" on a subject to get a more accurate sense of what Srila Prabhupada really thought on that topic. Locking ourselves only on a few isolated "Prabhupada saids" can easily create an imbalanced picture.

Just today, for instance, I received an email inviting me to undertake a *"Transformative journey with the Śrī Rāmacaritamānasa Course."* The email also

included a code to use *"at checkout to receive a special discount on your registration."* Hmm... appealing? Presumably, the organizers/teachers were only aware of the few positive remarks Srila Prabhupada made about Tulsidas, the author of the *Rama-carita-manasa*, and so they felt that those approving quotes were sufficient to legitimize designing a course on it. Srila Prabhupada did say, for instance, **"There is a book known as Ram Caritmanas written by one great devotee poet Tulsidas."** (Letter to Harivilasa, 14 June 1970), but he also said things like: **"He** [Tulsidas] **is not pure Vaiṣṇava. He has got Māyāvādī touch."** (Morning Walk, Vrindavana, 29 Aug 1975) and **"We don't take Tulsidas as authority."** (Conversation, Delhi, 11 Nov 1971)

The email advertisement assured prospective patrons: *"Let the lessons from Śrī Rāmacaritamānasa guide you towards a more meaningful and spiritually enriched life,"* but Srila Prabhupada said, **"Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava has immense literature. Why they should bother with Tulasīdāsa? By reading Tulasīdāsa's *Rāma-carita-mānasa*, in my experience I've not seen a single man has come to the spiritual platform. I have not seen a single man."** (Conversation, Hyderabad, 21 Aug 1976)

As the above quotes hopefully offer a fuller picture of Srila Prabhupada's assessment of the *Rama-carita-manasa*, I hope the following chapters will contribute to create a fuller picture of Srila Prabhupada's views on the Manu-samhita.

Problematic But Not Just Totally Discardable

Balaram Briant wisely warned against taking an attitude of radical rejection: "We should also remember that devotional service which rejects the scriptures is a disturbance to society, as Prabhupāda so often quoted: ***śruti-smṛti-purāṇādi-pañcarātra-vidhiṁ vinā aikāntikī harer bhaktir utpātāyaiva kalpate*** (Brs. 1.2.101). *Smṛti* refers to the *dharmaśāstras* in this context since purāṇa is mentioned separately. Lest there be any doubt, after quoting that verse, Prabhupāda specifically said, **'Just like *Manu-smṛti*. This is *smṛti*. And Vedas are *śruti*.'** (Moscow, 22 June 1971). In the same conversation, he says, **'The law given by Manu was so perfect that it can be applicable for all the time.'** I don't want to get into a quote flinging match, which would be a waste of time, but it seems reasonably clear that Prabhupāda understood Manu to be a valuable text that has its place. I think it would be a better use of our time to delineate what that place is in relation to our other *śāstras* than to argue about whether it has any validity, since Prabhupāda clearly felt it did."

Sure; the Manu-samhita, to quote Balaram Briant, certainly “has its place,” and I hope this book will contribute, even if in a small way, to clarify what that place may be. I also agree with him when he wrote, in the same thread: “As for the central point, I think hermeneutics always requires great care, and I certainly think that applies all the more so with a text like Manu which is certainly a secondary, or tertiary, text for us. I think trying to work out the hierarchy in detail would be a useful project for our movement, since so much confusion can arise from the situation you've pointed out, which is that people tend to view texts of shastra as all being equally authoritative when in reality, it is only by having a clearly organized hierarchy that we're able to determine the precedence and scope of scriptural injunctions.”

I agree with Balaram Briant that the Manu-samhita “is certainly a secondary, or tertiary, text for us.” I also agree that “it is only by having a clearly organized hierarchy that we're able to determine the precedence and scope of scriptural injunctions.” I wrote him: “On a different note, I truly appreciate your contributions, your being active on this thread, and I look forward to more comments from you—including critical ones—on the upcoming postings in this series.” He replied: “Thanks Prabhu, I appreciate the chance to discuss these issues. I think addressing them frankly is a good thing.” Let’s continue then.

What's Wrong with the Manu-samhita? – Part 2: "The Present Version Teaches Asura-varnasrama"

According to Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakura, the interpolation of the text eclipsed the original idea of *daiva-varnasrama* and instead promoted the mundane, asuric caste system based on birth. In his introduction to the *Kṛṣṇa-saṁhitā*, Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakura writes: **"The *varṇāśrama* system continued purely for a long time, until Jamadagni and his son Parashuram, of *kṣatrīya* natures, claimed themselves as *brāhmaṇas*. By following a *varṇa* contrary to their nature out of self interest, they created friction between the *brāhmaṇa* and *kṣatrīya* classes. Because of this seed of enmity between the two classes, the procedure of judging *varṇa* by birth became fixed. In time, this system of *varṇas* without reference to nature entered covertly in the *Manu-saṁhitā* and other scriptures."**

"And other scriptures." Ouch!

As a result, the present version of Manu-samhita promotes the caste system based on birth:

sarvavarṇeṣu tulyāsu patnīṣvakṣatayoniṣu |
ānulomyena sambhūtā jātyā jñeyāsta eva te

"Among all castes, those only who are born of consorts wedded in the natural order, as virgins of equal status, are to be regarded as the same (as their father)." (Ms 10.5)

That's *asura-varnasrama*. Someone may protest: "But why calling it '*asura-varnasrama*'? Isn't that a paroxysmic expression born of your anti-*smarta* belligerency; an exaggeration born of your wild militancy?" No, that's what the Founder-*Acarya* calls it: **"The *ācāryas* who advocate the *daiva-varṇāśrama* (the social order of *cātur-varṇyam* mentioned in the *Bhagavad-gītā*) do not accept the proposition of *āsura-varṇāśrama*, which maintains that the social order of *varṇa* is indicated by birth."** (CC, *Madhya* 3.6, purport)

The irony is that the self-appointed (pseudo)guardians and (pseudo)paladins of *daiva-varnasrama* are often the ones who most forcefully and persistently peddle the current text of the Manu-samhita.

(Nobody commented on this Facebook post. Perhaps no one felt to argue with Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakura?)

What's Wrong with Manu-samhita? Part 3 – "But Prabhupada Quoted It!"

There are almost two-hundred recorded instances of Srila Prabhupada mentioning the Manu-samhita or the Manu-smriti, which is the same thing. (Vanipedia lists more entries, but some are repetitions, or it's someone else speaking.) That constitutes a solid body of evidence that Srila Prabhupada took the Manu-samhita seriously, and it's not just a matter of quantity of citations. The contents and tenor of those quotes confirm this fact. Consider, for instance, this one, directly in the *Gita*: **"As for behavior, there are many rules and regulations guiding human behavior, such as the *Manu-saṁhitā*, which is the law of the human race."** (Bg 16.7, purport) Pretty… universal sounding. We must conclude that for Srila Prabhupada the Manu-samhita was an important reference point.

But important for what?

Important to what extent?

And to what extent the verses and concepts that Srila Prabhupada quoted legitimize the rest of the book, which he never quoted?

And how much of what he quoted would depend, for being beneficially implemented, on specific social, legal, and cultural circumstances that are not in place today?

How to find the correct exegetical balance between Srila Prabhupda's general endorsement of the book and his less approving or directly demeaning remarks?

These questions, I reckon, shall engage ISKCON and other Vaisnava scholars for years, perhaps for centuries.

Someone commented: "Regarding quotes where Srila Prabhupada dismissed the Manu-samhita, we need to study their context which in most cases proves to be not an absolute instruction for everyone but for a specific person under specific circumstances." I am not aware of any quote in which Srila Prabhupada "dismissed" the Manu-samhita; but, as we shall see, he at times explained its limited scope—such as when he categorized it as a *karma-kāṇḍa* text: **"For *karma-kāṇḍa* there are eighty authorized scriptures, such as Manu-saṁhitā."** (SB 6.1.7, purport). But that wasn't an instruction "for a specific person under specific circumstances," it was a formal statement of universal application.

The need to engage with the text is obvious, as the Manu-samhita is the elephant in the room of Indology. Some reject it for its more indigestible statements about corporal punishments, the treatment of women, or its calcified social hierarchical approach; but our Srila Prabhupada endorsed the book, and we are called to walk the tight rope between "unquestioning" loyalty to our Founder-*Acarya* and a dispassionate analysis of the limitations of the text and its applicability.

I hope that (real) scholars will approach the issue with great respect for the Founder-*Acarya* and with an authentic desire to find answers that will please Lord Krishna, not just to justify and peddle their personal penchants and prejudices from previous lives as *smarta-brahmanas*. As far as myself, I went through those two-hundred references and a picture is emerging. My motivation in writing on this subject is not to radically attack and dismiss the Manu-samhita and other *dharma-sastras*, but to counteract the ongoing campaigns by the neo-smartas who indiscriminately promote problematic secondary or tertiary references, eclipsing the primary sources of Gaudiya-vaisnavism.

What's Wrong with the Manu-samhita? Part 4 – "No Widow Should Remarry?"

While staying at John Lennon's estate outside London, Srila Prabhupada explained: **"In India, still, the system is followed in conservative families that a widow cannot marry. There is no widow marriage in India. They, the... Manu-saṁhitā, the law-givers, the saintly persons, Manu-saṁhitā... why widow marriage is prohibited? The idea is generally, everywhere, in all countries, the female population is greater than the male population. So the idea is that she has become widow. She was once married. Now if again she is married, the another virgin girl, she does not get the chance of being married. Therefore there is no widow marriage according to Hindu scripture."** (Lecture on SB 5.5.1-2, Tittenhurst, 13 Sept 1969)

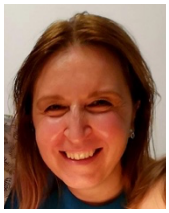
So, in a situation in which marriageable males are less than the females (not necessarily by birth-rate but also because a percentage of males choosing renunciation), if a girl gets a boy that would be considered her "husband-quota" for life, even if the husband dies relatively young. That would make sense when **"the female population is greater than the male population,"** but today in countries like India and China, due to robust female infanticide (before and after birth), there are less women than men. In 2020, for instance, India's ratio was 108.18 males per 100 females; in other words, 51.96% of the population was male and only 48.04% female. That's a percentage gap of almost 4 percent, or approximately 55 million more males than females; 55 million men who may remain unmarried for the lack of available women. And there are more than 40 million widows in India. Please keep in mind that 'widows' don't include only old women: 9% of all widows are in the 20-39 years age group. That's at least 3.6 million women, often intensely suffering from being unprotected and exploited. In rural India, 3% of all women aged 15–34 are widows. So, purely from the statistical perspective, what's the problem if some widows remarry? Considering the Manu-samhita's injunction that women should always be protected and the often-appalling treatment of widows in India, wouldn't allowing younger widows to remarry be reasonable and dharmic? What's the higher principle?

I am simply putting the question at the feet of the learned Vaisnavas and not necessarily drawing a conclusion. Yes, Srila Prabhupada spoke against widows remarrying; that's a fact; but the reason he gave—a larger female population—is no longer a fact, as the male-female ratio has been dramatically (and criminally) reversed. I asked the Facebook readers: "Please reflect and let me know what you think." A lady commented: "Even if Kaunteya's reason is speculation, there are many other circumstances that confirm his general point."

Well… thank you very much; all considered, I took it as a supportive comment

Another lady protested: "Don't spread a false narrative… How we have different *yuga dharma*, similarly for Kali-yuga, we have provision for women/widow remarriage and many such things in our *sastras*. Don't spread hatred towards Manu, who gave mankind our duty." I replied: "Thank you for your comment, which I find intriguing, and which I would like to understand better. Are you saying that other texts in the tradition refute Manu-smriti about widows remarrying? Is this what you are saying?" She confirmed: "Yes, prabhu." I asked her, "So do you confirm that the present version of Manu-samhita is not always relevant to the present times?" But I didn't hear from her again.

Pratik Raghav wrote: "No hard and fast rule to dharma. Polygamy, polyandry has been very common in ancient society. According to circumstances things can change." I responded, "Thanks for your comment; let's remember that Srila Prabhupada made that comment, about widows and the Manu-samhita, in passing, and, as far as I know, only once. So, I would expect that, if given the demographic facts and knowing the often-abominable treatment of widows in India, he might have readily modified his presentation."



Amala Prema Devi Dasi agreed: "If Srila Prabhupada were with us in present times, I am sure that he would adjust his position to the current factual situation in the demographic picture of India, i.e., approve young widows remarrying. Especially as it is dharmic."

But Ibietela Lillywest contested my comment. He wrote, addressing me personally: "A true Jagad Guru is never wrong because he sees everything from the eyes from where time, place, and circumstances have no meaning. I can bet you that there are a lot of women that, although not Indian by birth, go to India with the hope to get married, thereby increasing the population of unmarried women in India. Even

though, from your standpoint, Indian women are not enough, you managed to secure an Indian wife to whom you're happily married to. I have godbrothers from Ghana and Nigeria who are married to nice Indian ladies. Are you saying they increased the population of Indian men that are not yet married? Please, statistics is what we want, please calculate, and give us results."

Obviously, foreigners marrying Indian women decrease the availability of brides for Indian men—that's basic arithmetic—but as far as foreign ISKCON devotees marrying Indian ladies, the numbers are minuscule, practically statistically insignificant. As far as women that "go to India with the hope to get married," I have never observed this trend, at least not in any significant measure. But even if this phenomenon exists, I don't see how it could ever compensate for the shortage of 55 million Indian women (killed by selective abortion, female infanticide, etc.). Even an incoming exodus of biblical proportions of foreign women coming to India to find husbands would hardly make a dent in those figures.

Time, Place, and Circumstances – A Strong Pillar of Dharma Considerations

As far as the statement "A true Jagad Guru is never wrong because he sees everything from the eyes from where time, place, and circumstances have no meaning." Well, in a limited sense, yes, some of the teachings of great *acaryas* transcend their specific circumstances. Srila Prabhupada, for instance, spoke the same *Bhagavad-gita As It Is* in Tokyo or Toronto, in Delhi or Detroit. At the same time, Srila Prabhupada often stressed the importance of considering *deśa-kāla-pātra*, time, place, and candidates when establishing missionary policies. Let's take a brief detour on this point, as it is crucial to the immediate topic of widow remarriage but also to the overall topic of Manu-samhita. Srila Prabhupada emphasized this concept on dozens of occasions. This one is straight from the *Bhagavatam*: **"It is the concern of the *ācārya* to show mercy to the fallen souls. In this connection, *deśa-kāla-pātra* (the place, the time and the object) should be taken into consideration ... it is a principle that a preacher must strictly follow the rules and regulations laid down in the *śāstras* yet at the same time devise a means by which the preaching work to reclaim the fallen may go on with full force."** (CC Adi, 7.38, purport)

Another instance: **"That poet Allen Ginsberg, he said, 'Swamiji, you are very conservative.' No, I am the most liberal. You do not know. If I become conservative, then none of you will come to me. So a *brahmacārī* is strictly prohibited not to see even one young woman. But what can be done? In the Western countries, the boys and girls, they mix very freely. And if I say, 'My dear**

boys, you cannot see even a young girl,' then finished. My business there is finished. Therefore I have to arrange according to the country, according to the circumstances, as far as possible. So gradually, they are coming to the perfectional stage. So we have to adopt *deśa-kāla-pātra*, according to time, according to... But we are keeping our principles as it is but making arrangement according to the circumstances. That is required." (Lecture on SB. 1.2.10, Delhi, 16 Nov 1973)

Ultimately if widows could remarry or not, or in what circumstances they could, it's merely a detail in the overall effort of re-spiritualizing the world. In the lecture quoted at the beginning of this chapter Srila Prabhupada brings up the higher ratio of male-to-female as an argument against widows remarrying. In that lecture, just before saying **"In India, still, the system is followed in conservative families that a widow cannot marry,"** Srila Prabhupada spoke about *tapasya*: **"That is austerity. That is, voluntarily, you are restraining himself. *Tapasya* means voluntary restraint."** (Lecture on SB 5.5.1-2, Tittenhurst, 13 Sept 1969) So, *voluntary restraint*: the spirit, clear from the context, is not imposing draconian, inflexible restrictions, but encouraging the reduction of material attachment and entanglement. It's like saying, "You've got a husband, he died; Hare Krishna, now focus on your spiritual life." Srila Prabhupada spells that out on another occasion: **"By training we can find so many *brahmacārīs*. Just like by training you have given up so many things ... naturally one Hindu widow is trained up not to marry again. Once she got a husband, that's all right. 'Now you convert your... you divert your attention to**

Kṛṣṇa.' They'll make propaganda, 'Why stop her sense gratification? Let her marry again, widow marriage.' Why widow marriage? If there is voluntarily giving up begetting any more child, to avoid husband, why the widow marriage bill is introduced? Everything was natural." (Conversation, Vrindavana, 6 Sept 1976)

That's the ideal; when detachment is **"natural."** But Srila Prabhupada also said that, in certain circumstances, widows could remarry: **"Widow marriage was especially allowed only when the girl did not see her husband at any time, or she had no children."** (Lecture on SB 1.8.51, Los Angeles, 13 May 1973) I hope these references provide a more nuanced portrait of Srila Prabhupada's attitude on widows' remarriage. The mention of the Manu-samhita appears as a circumstantial support for the higher spiritual principle of detachment.

Daman R. Dkd Derling (Damana Krishna Das) narrated: "My granny's friend was 17 when she lost her fiancé in a Nazi attack. She left her body at 89; I knew her for 40 years. She said to me, 'My heart is with that man.' She never considered anyone else. But where do we see chastity now in any terms?"

Mahaprabhu Gaura Dasa, always the historian, commented: "Srila Prabhupada said in the quoted reference: **'no widow marriage according to Hindu scripture.'** It appears that this does not specifically imply that he was against it, at least according to this reference. Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakura was the first *acarya* to encourage widow remarrying. He allegedly prosecuted forced Satis (forcibly burning widows alive), but I couldn't find yet direct references. He wrote in *Marriage System of Bengal* (1871) in favor of the modern protection of women from ruthless Hindu superstitions. Last year in Vrindavana two young feminist students approached me, girls in their early 20s. I was not prepared for the interview, but their questions made me think a lot about Vrindavana being 'the city of widows,' and all the stories of how young widows are being thrown out in the street by their in-laws, who accuse them of being responsible for the premature death of their husbands, and left without money and property, they massively go to Vrindavana, if Vaisnavis, or to Varanasi, if Saivas, Saktas, etc."

Mahajana Dasa commented: "so cruel, and all based in superstition. Instead of a superior culture it becomes a horrible and heartless culture, no sane men will defend

these practices. No spirituality at all, yes, misogyny … Truth is truth. Vedic and Indian culture has much enlightenment but also many horrible things. The treatment of women as inferior is a reality that is clearly seen in widows condemned to not marry out of obligation and to be abandoned by their husband's family. And they cannot return to their families of origin … there are millions of girls aborted in selective abortions. Selective abortions even in Vrindavana, with the stupid argument that the first child must be a boy. This has nothing to do with superior culture. They have been infected by superstitions typical of uncivilized and irrational cultures. If we do not know how to distinguish truth from superstition, we are lost."

Mahaprabhu Gaura Dasa also wrote: "Hinduism became degraded to *asura-varnasrama* (the caste system) in which the most malign practices in human sociology happened, such as forced Satis. The political hegemony of Buddhism, Islam and Christianity tried to reform Hinduism with granting equal opportunities to all. I celebrate the abolishment of forced Satis 200 years ago by the activism of William Carrey and Raja Rammohun Roy. I am not a follower of Christianity or Brahmoism, but I do recognize that reforms from outside may do good to Hinduism which in the name of self-preserving fundamentalism may traditionalize the most ruthless superstitions. Recently *The City of Widows* documentary revealed the dark side of Vrindavana. And let me be clear, Vrindavana is the most sacred place for me, but my conscience also dictates to me to recognize that it has also a dark side. I struggled for about 20 years with some cognitive dissonances, trying to see everything as spiritual, but the toxic aspects of Hinduism must be recognized and addressed."

Mahajana Dasa could fully relate to that: "Yes, we should face cognitive dissonances. What is good IS good, no matter who said it, and what is bad IS bad, no matter where is coming from. When I joined 40 years ago, I bought all as good or transcendental, but now it's impossible for me to think like this. There IS misogyny, superstition, racism, supremacism, and many other things that are bad and should be separated from and rejected in spiritual life because they are not spiritual, they are not superior; they are inferior and perverse."

Mahaprabhu Gaura Dasa: "Thank God that 40 million widows are not there in Vrindavana … but even 20,000, many of them claiming that they were mistreated by their in-laws, is a lot. These are not just numbers and percentages, but personal

stories that indicate that toxic Hindu superstitions still exist in the 21st century … statistics indicate that more reform should be applied to some tangible existing practices of misogyny, female infanticide, etc. I think Kaunteya Das Prabhu is specialized in this area; he could offer some more facts about it."

Well, I don't consider myself "specialized in this area," but I did some research for writing the book "How to Mess Up Varnasrama By Underestimating Women & Neglecting Gurukula"—which is available as a free download.[8] In one chapter I wrote about the widows of Vrindavana. I shared some of their stories, such as the one told by 65-year-old Arti Mistri: "I was 18 when my husband died. I was thrown out of the house by my in-laws because they feared that I would demand a share in the ancestral property." Which was her legal right, by the way. She had to live without the shelter of a family for 47 years. But chasing widows out of their homes is unfortunately a common practice in India, although it's specifically prohibited in the Manu-samhita: "A son who does not take care of her widow mother deserves condemnation." (Ms 9.4) "Neither the mother, nor the father, nor the wife, nor the son deserve to be forsaken; he who forsakes these, unless they are outcasts, should be fined six hundred by the king." (Ms 8.389). In that chapter I also report about rape, disfigurement by acid, downy deaths, etc. The problem is that power in the hands of unqualified, uneducated, damaged men can turn women's existence into a living hell.

Vrindavana widows (credit: Pascal Mannaerts)

[8] https://archive.org/details/how-to-mess-up-varnasrama-by-underestimating-women-neglecting-gurukula-kaunteya-das

What's Wrong with Manu-samhita? Part 5 – "A Place of Pilgrimage for Crows?!"

Comparing the Manu-samhita to a destination for crows appears truly offensive. Generally, the metaphor of places fit for crows is used for truly despicable literature, useless, salacious, foolish books and magazines not for… *sastra*?! Tendentially, therefore, I would like to categorically disassociate myself from the metaphor; but (what can I do?) that's the analogy Srila Prabhupada gives in his rendition of Narada Muni's instructions to his disciple Vyasadeva. Srila Prabhupada spoke it in a lecture on SB 1.5.9-11, given in New Vrindavana on 6 June 1969:

"The defect in Vyāsadeva was being pointed out by his spiritual master, Nārada … 'You have labored very hard in presenting *dharmādayaḥ*.' *Dharmādayaḥ* means religiosity, economic development … any other religion which does not teach how to surrender unto God, that is pretension. That is not religion … He says, Nārada Muni (SB 1.5.10):

na yad vacaś citra-padaṁ harer yaśo
jagat-pavitraṁ pragṛṇīta karhicit
tad vāyasaṁ tīrtham uśanti mānasā
na yatra haṁsā niramanty uśik-kṣayāḥ

So he is comparing all the books written by Vyāsadeva, including the Vedānta philosophy. He says that this is *vāyasaṁ tīrtham*. *Vāyasaṁ tīrtham*. *Vāyasam* means crows … the crows, they take pleasure in all nasty things, the crows … So here Nārada Muni said that 'You have compiled so many books, that's all right. What is the idea? The idea is *dharmādayaḥ*. You are teaching religious principle.' There are twenty, *viṁśati*, *dharma-śāstrāḥ*. This *Manu-saṁhitā*, Parāśara Muni's law, and social custom, this, that—so many things there are … Nārada is comparing that 'Your so-called books describing about this *dharma-artha-kāma-mokṣa* is just like the *kāka*'s, or the crow's, pleasure-hunting.'"

No comment.

(And no comment came from anyone on this post.)

What's Wrong with Manu-samhita? Part 6 – "Is Not Religion"

Srila Prabhupada wrote that **"to preach Bhagavat religion sometimes we have to quote from the shastras what is not palatable to unscrupulous so called religious persons. But in preaching we cannot do without quoting the proper verses. Sometime they take it adversely and we become subject to unwanted criticism. Actually there is no religion in the world accept Bhagavat religion, namely surrendering to the lotus feet of the Lord."** (Letter to Sri Pannalalji, 16 May 1974)

The "crow quote" in the previous section was an example of what we may call "laser, radical, *bhagavata* clarity," the uncompromising outlook of those who are deeply convinced that Krishna is the real goal of the Vedas, and everything else, even if "Vedic," is at best a pious diversion that remains fundamentally *kaitava-dharma*, cheating religion: **"Sriman Sridhar Swami the original commentator of Srimad Bhagavatam says religious systems up to the idea of liberation are cheating."** (Letter to Sri Pannalalji, 16 May 1974) When expressed by the *acaryas* (and tempered by the compassionate awareness that people have also needs in the socio-economic, the sexual, and the emotional sphere), such categorical statements harmoniously blend within an overall presentation that wisely addresses all anthropological dimensions. Therefore, for instance, Srila Prabhupada put so much energy promoting *varṇāśrama*, although **"the *varṇāśrama-dharma*, that is material."** (Lecture on SB 1.8.41, Mayapur, 21 Oct 1974) To elevate people, the *acaryas* talk about so many things, even from scriptures of a lesser caliber. But the followers of the *acaryas* need to be clear about the hierarchy of the various sources and not be confused every time a book is labelled as "*sastra.*"

Rigorously speaking from the pure *bhagavata* point of view, Srila Prabhupada declares: **"Manu-saṁhitā is not religion. It is moral principles for conducting society. Religion is how to become devotee of Kṛṣṇa. That is religion."** (Morning Walk, Hyderabad, 20 April 1974) Somehow someone protested even this quote: "Rejecting Manu-samhita as 'only moral principles' is a sign of *sahajiya* whereas an immoral person cannot be considered a devotee." Besides the fact that the word "only" is added to the quote, who the *sahajiya* is supposed to be? It cannot be Srila Prabhupada; that would be too… irrational. Plus, Srila Prabhupada did not "reject" the Manu-samhita; he simply said that "is not religion" (in the purely *bhagavata* sense of the word). It seems that this devotee implies that, apparently because of the crime of sharing the quote, I qualify as a *sahajiya* who is promoting debauchery and decadence.

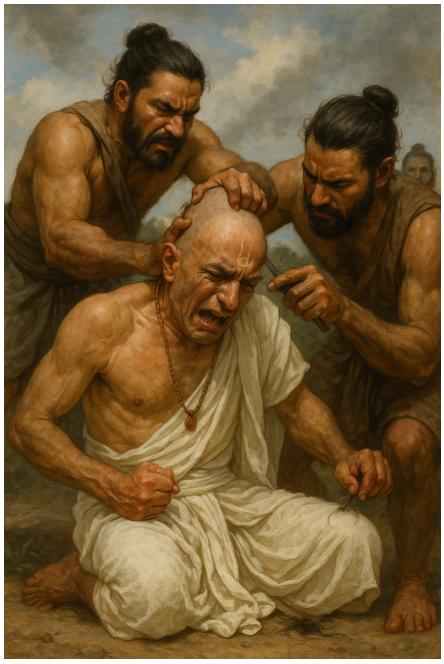
Punishable Or Unpunishable?

In connection with "**moral** [and legal] **principles for conducting society**," Ante Glavina (Anupa Krishna das) wrote feelingly, starting by quoting Srila Prabhupada: "'**According to Vedic injunction, children, women, brahmins, old men and cow ... These five items, according to *Manu-saṁhitā*, or Hindu law, they have no offense. They have no offense. They cannot be criminally prosecuted, are excused. If a brahmin has committed some fault or a woman has committed some fault or a child has committed some fault or a cow has transgressed the law, oh, there is no punishment for them. *Dayā*. They should be shown always mercy. They require protection, especially. These five items have been especially enjoined that they should be given protection.**'" (Lecture on SB 12.2.1, San Francisco, 18 March 1968) Dear prabhuji, for decades, I have had problems digesting these instructions ... It seems to me that there is no way for me to understand and accept this provision as correct. For God's sake, why should a woman who has committed a criminal offense be exempt from criminal prosecution? The same question applies to all the others except the cow. It is logical that a cow cannot be responsible for its actions, but the modern woman is not a cow, nor has she ever been one before. What makes her, like any other human being, incapable of being responsible for her actions? One thing is the need of every society to specially protect the weaker, old men, children, *brāhmaṇa*, cow and women, but I cannot agree that special protection implies that none of them can be criminally prosecuted ... Everyone should be responsible for their own actions except someone who is crazy or is an animal. Normal children, woman, *brāhmaṇas*, old men must be prosecuted and punished for their crimes. That's basic common sense. Is it not?"

I answered: "Yes, it's potentially very confusing, especially as the Manu-samhita does indicate various punishments for *brahmanas* and women. And to correct children, of course, is a standard part of raising them. It seems that it would be necessary to identify what verse or section Srila Prabhupada is quoting and analyze the context and the connections. Thank you for sharing."

The Manu-samhita does indeed recognize women as responsible for their actions. In terms of karma, the text clearly states that there is punishment in the next life for guilty women: "The woman, who, through failure in her duty to her husband, becomes an object of contempt in the world, comes to be born as a jackal and is tormented by foul diseases." (Ms 9.30) As far as criminal prosecution, the text also lists various punishments, such as whipping, paying fines, or even amputation of

fingers for women performing lawless acts: "If a maiden pollutes another maiden [makes her lose her virginity], her fine shall be two hundred; she shall also pay the double of her nuptial fee and shall receive ten lashes." (Ms 8.369) "But if a woman pollutes a maiden, she deserves immediate shaving off, or the amputation of two fingers, and also being carried by a donkey." (Ms 8.370) And these are not the only rules imposing punishment on women. Clearly, women were not exempted from prosecution.



As far as *brahmanas*, in some cases the Manu-samhita prescribes more lenient penalties for *brahmanas* than for members of other castes: "Tonsure has been prescribed as the death-penalty for the *Brāhmaṇa*; for other castes the penalty would be actual death. Verily he [the king] shall not kill the *Brāhmaṇa*, even though he be steeped in all crimes; he should banish him from the kingdom, with all his property and unhurt." (Ms. 379-380) In other cases, heavier punishment is mandated for *brahmanas* than for other social groups: "In the case of theft, the guilt of a *Śūdra* is eightfold, that of the *Vaiśya* sixteen-fold, and that of the *Kṣatriya* thirty-two-fold; that of the *Brāhmaṇa* sixty-four-fold, or fully hundred-fold, or twice sixty-four-fold; when he is cognisant of the good or bad quality of the act." (Ms 337-338) In this case, for the same action, the culpability of a learned *brahmana*, who should know better, is greater than that of less educated men. This may make Srila Prabhupada's statement that *brahmanas* and women are not punishable a bit puzzling. It seems that he may be using a hyperbolic expression, a "poetic" exaggeration not to be taken literally; or he may be referring only to minor infractions. In a *Bhagavatam* purport Srila Prabhupada makes a general observation on punishing the guilty, without mentioning about *brahmanas* and women being exempted from prosecution: **"The traffic regulations on the street, telling people to keep to the right or the left, are meant for human beings, not for animals. If an animal violates such a law, he is never punished, but a human being is punished. The *Vedas* are not meant for the animals, but for the understanding of human society. A person who indiscriminately violates the rules and regulations given by the *Vedas* is liable to be punished."** (SB 4.26.6, purport)

I hope this helped assuage the doubt of that devotee. In any case the discussion illustrated how difficult it is to extricate universal guidelines from Srila Prabhupada's occasional references to the Manu-samhita. We have records of him mentioning the book some 200 times; but, over more than eleven years of constant speaking and writing, that's less than once every twenty days. Not exactly a constant theme. Compare with, say, "*Bhagavad-gita*," with more than 22,000 entries in Vanipedia—which means that, on average, Srila Prabhupada mentioned it more than five times *a day*.

What's Wrong with the Manu-samhita? Part 7 – "It's *Karma-kāṇḍa*"

We need a clear grasp of the hierarchy of authority of the various *sruti, smriti*, puranas, *dharma-sastra*, etc. otherwise unscrupulous people shall succeed in introducing incompatible and deleterious attitudes (backed up by sastra!) within Gaudiya-vaisnavism. For instance, every Gaudiya-vaisnava accepts the *Bhagavata Purana* as supreme among the eighteen major puranas. Similarly, we must clearly "place" the various *dharma-sastra* within a realistic pyramid of significance and usefulness among *sastra*. We should treasure the words of the Founder-*Acarya* when he offers a key for classification: **"Manu-saṁhitā is not religion. It is moral principles for conducting society. Religion is how to become devotee of Kṛṣṇa. That is religion."** (Morning Walk, Hyderabad, 20 April 1974)

Srila Prabhupada also offers another, technical categorization: **"For *karma-kāṇḍa* there are eighty authorized scriptures, such as *Manu-saṁhitā*, which are known as *dharma-śāstras*. In these scriptures one is advised to counteract his sinful acts by performing other types of fruitive action."** (SB 6.1.7, purport) In other words, **"authorized scriptures, such as *Manu-saṁhitā*"** belong to a lower classification of sastra, certainly lower than pure *bhagavata-dharma* texts. In the same purport, Srila Prabhupada explains that the *karma-kāṇḍa* idea of **"performing pious acts to counteract ... impious acts"** can only be suitable for **"one who does not take to devotional service."**

This underlines the limited relevance of such *karma-kāṇḍa* texts for Vaisnavas. Even if Srila Prabhupada and the other *acaryas* occasionally quoted *karma-kāṇḍa* sources, extracting from them some nuggets of moral and social wisdom, we shouldn't make the mistake of considering such scriptures as valuable and relevant as the core texts

of Gaudiya-vaisnavism, such as the *Srimad-Bhagavatam* (which, by way, contrarily to so many other *sastra*, maintained an exceptionally consistent textual uniformity throughout the millennia).

A Pot of Poison?!

The problem with *karma-kāṇḍa* texts is not just that they are simply lower than the scriptures directly promoting pure devotional service. The issue is that our *acaryas* have emphatically warned us—and the public in general—about dabbling in *karma-kāṇḍa* and *jñāna-kāṇḍa.* Narottama Das Thakura, for instance, armed with his customary surgical, dissecting discernment and his typical directness, has sung, *karma-kāṇḍa, jñāna-kāṇḍa, kevala viṣera bhāṇḍa*; **"the paths of *karma-kanda*** (fruitive activities) **and *jnana-kanda*** (speculation) **are just like pots of strong poison."**

And he is talking about sastra!

Srila Prabhupada elaborates: **"For a Vaiṣṇava, the *karma-kāṇḍa* and *jñāna-kāṇḍa* sections of the Vedas are unnecessary. Indeed, a real Vaiṣṇava takes these sections as a poison pot (*viṣera bhāṇḍa*)."** (CC Madhya, 5.24, purport) The fact that Srila Prabhupada classifies the Manu-samhita as a *karma-kāṇḍa* text should represent a compelling deterrent from frivolously fiddling with it or from unquestioningly embrace such a "poison pot" (Srila Prabhupada's expression, not mine). The neo-smartas, misrepresenting themselves as Vedic promoters and saviors of purity, generously poison ISKCON.

Does Relativizing the Manu-samhita Automatically Turns One into a Nama-aparadhi?

Uttamasloka Das Brahmachari wrote: "I'd be interested to hear your reply to this, Prabhu." and shared this screenshot:

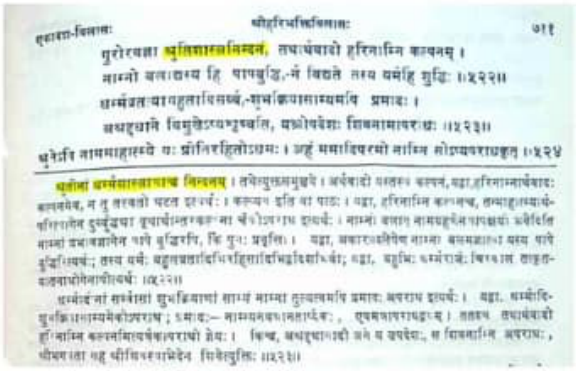
Basu Ghosh Das
2h ·

Important point here in the screen shot, herein below.

Those "devotees" -- no matter how high and mighty they may consider themselves -- if they decry Manu Samhita/Smriti, they are "offenders to the holy name"!

ISKCON liberals are indeed "guilty as charged" because they do not want to accept varnashram dharma as described in the Manu Samhita/Manu Smriti.

I was looking for something else, however, I found the following from Hari-bhakti-vilasa, 11th Vilasa, text 522, Sanatana Gosvami's Dig-dashini commentary:

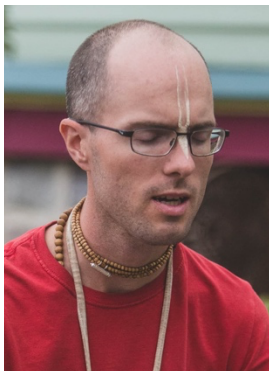


It says that "To blaspheme Shrutis and Dharma-shastras is an offense to the holy names."

Those who claim that devotees don't need Manu-samhita and other Dharma-shastras, that serve as guides for human beings, are offenders to the holy names. And therefore, genuine devotees should accept the guidelines given in the Dharma-shastras for navigating their life smoothly, for they are favorable for executing devotional service (आनुकूल्येन कृष्णानुशीलनम्).

I replied: "Thanks for raising this point, Prabhu. A quick reply: I already explained in another post that the *varnasrama* presented in the present edition of Manu-samhita is the *asura-varnasrama* based on birth and decried by our *acaryas*. Are we supposed to follow that?!" While I only commented on the *varnasrama* side of the

claim, Lokarāma Dāsa gave a more elaborated answer, elegantly dismantling the groundless allegations of *nama-aparadha* offered in the screenshot:



"Uttamasloka Das Brahmachari Prabhu, this extensive commentary is all coming from Basu Ghosh Prabhu. The only thing Sanatana Goswami says here is that the word *śāstra*, in the fourth offense to the holy name, refers to the *dharma-śāstras*. Otherwise, to say '*śruti-śāstra-nindanam*' would be redundant (since *śruti* is already a synonym for the *śāstras*). Sanatana Goswami gives no further commentary than this on the fourth offense. The implication of Basu Ghosh Prabhu's reply is that Srila Prabhupada's various statements clarifying the position of Manu-samhita constitute *nama-aparadha*. What about when Vaisnava *acharyas* say we don't need to follow the Śiva Purāṇa or other *śāstras* that have been classified in terms of the three modes of nature? Are they committing *nāma-aparādha*? Do Gaudiya Vaisnavas 'need' to follow such Purāṇas? Is saying that we do not need them *nāma-aparādha*? Why Manu-samhita? *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* already gives ample injunctions in the realm of *Daiva-varṇāśrama-dharma*."

In other words, if relativizing the Manu-samhita was an automatic *nama-aparadha*, Srila Prabhupada and the other *acaryas* would be all offenders of the holy name. Are there any takers for that idea? Caitanya Chandra Das commented: "Just one small point: in the *Govinda Bhasya*, Baladeva Vidyabhusana proves the point that all the verses of the Vedas speak about Krsna. Therefore, even *karma-kanda* scriptures speak about devotional service, it's just that it is hidden. Our *acaryas* however may invoke this higher meaning when quoting it. This however doesn't mean we should follow such books."

This, I believe, is a profoundly pertinent point: when the *acaryas* quote *dharma-sastras* and other secondary or tertiary sources, they do it with an extraordinary depth and breadth of comprehension, aware of the relative worth of each text and extracting only the useful essence, like divine bumblebees. Neophytes and neo-smartas, on the other hand, run the risk (or purposefully attempt) to *absolutizing* such sources, generating confusion and unorthodoxy. Completing the gallery of learned comments on this section, Balaram Briant wrote: "The *Dharmaśāstras* are valuable insofar as they help us elevate our lives to the mode of goodness, which is important for the reasons Prabhupāda explains: **'In all spiritual affairs, one's first**

duty is to control his mind and senses. Unless one controls his mind and senses, one cannot make any advancement in spiritual life. Everyone within this material world is engrossed in the modes of passion and ignorance. One must promote himself to the platform of goodness, *sattva-guṇa*, by following the instructions of Rūpa Gosvāmī, and then everything concerning how to make further progress will be revealed." (NOI Preface) As Lokarāma Prabhu pointed out, much of what is necessary for us from the *dharma-śāstras* has been extracted by our *ācāryas* in works like *Hari-bhakti-vilāsa*, and much of what is left is superseded by *Bhāgavatam*. Still, as you pointed out in your post on 'lawbooks for the next 10,000 years,'[9] it will take quite a bit of work to turn the *Bhāgavatam* model into an actual social and legal system. Since the *Dharmaśāstras* provide important context for and expansion of *Bhāgavatam*'s social instruction, they're going to have to be a part of that project. Some of the *Bhāgavatam*'s verses on *varṇāśrama*, for example, are unintelligible without the context of the *Dharmaśāstras*. But that's a scholarly project that doesn't need to involve every layman; I'm not suggesting that we make Manu standard reading."

Explicit & Implicit Motivations for Engaging with the Manu-samhita

Should Vaisnavas engage with the Manu-samhita? Some intentions are legitimate, even noble. As Srila Prabhupada endorsed the book, sincere followers may want to explore it and isolate pearls of social wisdom. Legal professionals may wish to extract some useful principles of jurisprudence. Scholarly devotees may have to explain and defend the defensible aspects of the text, emphasizing the healthy aspects and explaining the cultural context of the civilization(s) that produced it. Other devotees, though, may have less virtuous intentions. Some, confused by the quantity of texts under the umbrella of "sastra," may naively consider the Manu-samhita (since, "It's sastra, Prabhu") at the same level of, say, the *Gita* or the *Bhagavatam*. Others, affected by psychic impressions from previous existences as smarta brahmanas may be subconsciously and morbidly charmed by the rigid caste-centered worldview of the Manu-samhita. They may thus be victimized by their "subliminal nostalgia" of class privilege. Without even knowing it, their elitist conditioning attracts them to the text's highly sclerotized and anachronistic message. Their inner bias, apparently hardly untamed even by decades of participation in Lord Caitanya's movement, may predispose them toward a subtle but powerful disloyalty to the canons of Gaudiya-vaisnavism. Some people seem resistant to consider the actual relevance of *dharma-sastras* for Vaisnavas; for

[9] See Appendix One.

example, someone declared, somewhat cryptically and categorically: "Manu samhita is Manu samhita is Manu samhita, regardless of age." But Dvija Gauranga Das differed: "Manu samhita fits Kali Yuga like a size three fits Pavarotti."

What's Wrong with the Manu-samhita? Part 8: "The Minefield"

As stated several times, Srila Prabhupada did, as a general statement, legitimize and recommend the Manu-samhita as a bona fide *sastra*: **"The *Manu-saṁhitā* is the standard lawbook for humanity, and every human being is advised to follow this great book of social knowledge."** (SB 2.1.36, purport) Receiving this kind of message from the Founder-*Acarya* can be compared to inheriting a minefield, a piece of land full of mines that can explode at any time, causing horrible destruction. The land is still valuable, but only if the mines get defused. So, what are these *explosive devices* present in the Manu-samhita? Here I am sharing some famously contentious Manu-samhita verses; but there are many others. I won't comment on each of them, but, as a framing, I am humbly requesting you to ask yourself questions such as:

1. Are these injunctions something that a Gaudiya-vaisnava should recommend to the contemporary judicial powers for implementation?
2. Is this the type of *varnasrama* Srila Prabhupada wanted to establish?
3. Are these rules relevant and applicable today?
4. Should Vaisnavas reject these ideas as inapplicable or even unethical?

Ready? Let's start.

8.270: "If a once-born person [a *sudra*] insults a twice-born one with gross abuse, he should suffer the cutting off of his tongue; as he is of low origin."

8.271: “If he [the *sudra*] mentions the name and caste of these men with scorn, a burning iron nail ten inches long shall be thrust into his mouth.”

8.272: “If through arrogance, he [the *sudra*] teaches *brāhmaṇas* their duty, the king shall pour heated oil into his mouth and ears.”

8.279-280: “With whatever limb a man of a low caste does hurt to (a man of the three) highest (castes), even that limb shall be cut off; that is the teaching of Manu. If he raises his hand or a stick, he should have his hand cut off; if he strikes in anger with the foot, his foot shall be cut off.”

8.281-282: “A low-caste man who tries to place himself on the same seat with a man of a high caste, shall be branded on his hip and be banished, or (the king) shall cause his buttock to be gashed. If out of arrogance he spits (on a superior), the king shall cause both his lips to be cut off; if he urines (on him), the penis; if he breaks wind (against him), the anus.”

8.417: “A *Brahmana* may confidently seize the goods of (his) *sudra*; for, as that can have no property, his master may take his possessions.”

9.88: “Out of fear of the appearance of the menses, let the father marry his daughter while she still runs about naked. For if she stays in the home after the age of puberty, sin falls on the father.”

5.152: "Even if the husband is morally degraded, engaged in an affair with another woman and is devoid of knowledge and other qualities, the wife must treat him like a god."

8.371: “If a wife, proud of the greatness of her relatives or (her own) excellence, violates the duty which she owes to her husband, the king shall cause her to be devoured by dogs in a place frequented by many.”

You get the idea of the tenor and style of the legal system of what is known as “Manu-samhita.” Perhaps you can relate with my astonishment when I read, in a paper published on the site of the so-called “ISKCON India Scholars Board,”[10] a statement such as this: “Some may contest the relevance of *Manu-smṛti* and other Vedic texts to *bhakti,* or pure devotional service. Such objections are purely based on mental concoctions.” Dear reader, you should know that if you object to cutting out the tongue of a *sudra* who insults a *brahmana*; or if you object to the idea of punishing disloyal women by having dogs devouring them, according to the great thinkers of the “ISKCON India Scholars Board” your “objections are purely based on mental concoctions”; so repent and reform!

Madhavananda N Krishnakund (Madhavananda Prabhu, GGS) wrote: “*Manu-samhita* is *sastra*. All of our *acaryas* say that. As *sastra*, we should respect it. However, as you are so nicely pointing out (thank you!), it's not on the level of the *bhakti-sastras*, and there are injunctions in it that appear bizarre and irrelevant for Gaudiya bhaktas, and… well, for anyone in this age. If someone wants to insist that we follow *Manu-samhita* (which as far as I have found historically has never ever been formally implemented anywhere), then those who are insisting on the importance of it, should (‘If it's really an important *sastra*, prabhu’), accept all of it. For to accept only half the chicken is offensive. Since they should accept all of it, they should next, kindly explain to the devotees in our society, exactly how injunctions such as the ones you have listed are relevant and to be practiced by us.”

[10] A board never established or recognized by any legally instituted, official ISKCON entity—and certainly never created, selected, or elected by the real, genuine ISKCON India.

Caitanya Chandra Das wrote: "Many of these passages seem to be adulterations. There are many adulterations in all versions currently available. In a passage, there is even a fine of a certain number of coins fixed for a certain transgression. This is obviously not from Manu. There was no currency in Satya-yuga. If one would want to apply the *Manu-samhita*, he would first have to find the original verses spoken by Manu. Just because it's written *'Manu-samhita'* on the cover, it does not mean it was spoken by Manu. Good luck in finding a bona fide version of the *Manu-samhita* nowadays..."

Madhavananda Prabhu commented: "Bhaktivinode says that it has been heavily interpolated. Also, *Manu-samhita* is described in other *Dharma-sastras* as not being for this age." Caitanya Chandra Das replied: "Yes, there is this point also. In other eras they follow the *Vaidika* system, that is a system appropriate to prevent a perfect society from degrading, while in Kali-yuga we follow the *pancaratrika* system, that is appropriate to gradually elevate a degraded society. Another point is that the *Manu-sanhita* is considered part of the *karma-kanda* section of the Vedas ... Nowhere is said that vaishnavas are supposed to practice *karma-kanda*, although we follow the general rules for a pious life to the extent it doesn't conflict with the principles of devotional service. Prabhupada recommends that materialistic people follow the principles of the *Manu-samhita*, just like he tells them to follow the general principles of the Vedas, but he made it clear that it doesn't apply to devotes. He was against his disciples studying and trying to implement the rules of the *Manu-samhita*. Even if we would disregard this instruction, we would have to first find an unadulterated copy of the *Manu-samhita* that would without doubt contain only the verses spoken by Manu."

Ravinol Samuel Chambers commented: "It's scary that anyone would have any faith in a book like that. If you think about it, what kind of person would have an interest in a book like this? Most likely a person who identifies themselves as the superior class mentioned (the *Brahmana* class) and who likes the idea of the subjugative power the book says he can exercise over others that he identifies (with support from the book) as being lesser than him."

Death Penalty Anyone?

I don't wish to get too deeply into a discussion here, but even the basic concept of capital punishment, death penalty, which the Manu-samhita mandates as a standard sentencing for certain crimes, is nowadays a contentious topic. Srila Prabhupada supported the notion, for instance in this lecture: **"The *Manu-smṛti*, it is said that if a man commits murder, then he should be killed. Otherwise, he'll suffer in the next life."** (Lecture on Bg 2.32, London, 2 September 1973) The karmic "logic" is clear, but I have observed that even devotees hold different and conflicting views on the subject. Some emphasize the sastric and philosophical soundness of the death penalty; while others stress that in the hands of unqualified and corrupted judges the death penalty can turn into a lethal weapon, for example to "legally" get rid of political rivals. Rightly or wrongly, most countries have completely abolished the death penalty. I am bringing this up just to show that even a basic Manu-samhita concept such as capital punishment, once accepted and practiced almost everywhere, has been repudiated by many and remains a source of debate and controversy even among Srila Prabhupada's followers.

Meager Marriable Maidens

Even if not atrocious sounding as the verses recommending chopping off tongues and genitals, other sections are nonetheless touchy, and clearly not practical or advisable for universal application, such as the guidelines for choosing wives. Verse 3.4 says that "The twice-born person," having completed his education, "shall take a wife of the same caste as himself." The book then lists the characteristic to seek or to avoid in a prospective bride. Some recommendations make immediate sense, such as keeping away from a woman who is too sickly (Ms 3.8) or coming from a family prone to diseases such as epilepsy and leprosy (Ms 3.7)—characteristics that could turn married life into a very miserable experience. Other advice may need a more thorough analysis and explanation—and even then, we may conclude that we can't promote it unquestionably. For example: "One should not marry women who have reddish hair." (Ms 3.8) (*nodvahet kapilāṃ kanyāṃ.*) Hmm… But about two percent of the world population is redheaded. That would make some eighty million girls ineligible for marriage.[11] Maidens from Ireland would be especially affected, as five percent of them have red hair! Commentator Medhatithi (more about this fellow later) includes blondes (hairs of "golden color") in the unmarriable *kapilāṃ kanyāṃ* category. That would disqualify an additional 120 million girls. Once I asked a *sannyasi* about this red hair thing. He said that read hair is a sign of increased *pitta*, which may denote a fiery temperament. A peaceful, placid *brahmana* may think

[11] Particularly with twice-born men.

twice before tying the knot with an intense, tempestuous woman. Other men, though, can manage—as we empirically observe—very harmonious and congenial marriages with redhaired and blonde spouses. The same verse (Ms 3.8), also recommends not to marry a girl having "too much hair" (*nātilomāṃ*)—although the text doesn't offer details on how much hair is too much. Another verse in that section, Ms 3.11, recites: "One should marry a female with a faultless body, bearing an agreeable name, having her gait like that of the swan or the elephant." Perhaps people of ancient India could easily recognize a swan-like or elephant-like walking style but nowadays may not always be clear how sufficiently elegant—swanlike enough or elephantlike enough—a girl's stride should be for her to qualify as bride material. More concerning or troublesome appears the requirement of "a faultless body" (*avyaṅgāṅgīṃ*). Who could claim that? What's the standard? Would a couple of pimples disqualify the girl? The commentators did their best in offering detailed descriptions of acceptable bodily parameters, but unambiguous clarity and precision may remain elusive in such matters. And what about the women—presumably many—that couldn't meet all the ideal requirements? I guess men would adjust their highest expectations and desires to what's available on the "market" and somehow settle for workable outcomes. No man would be legally prosecuted for marrying someone insufficiently swan-like or someone having a tawny tinge in her hair.

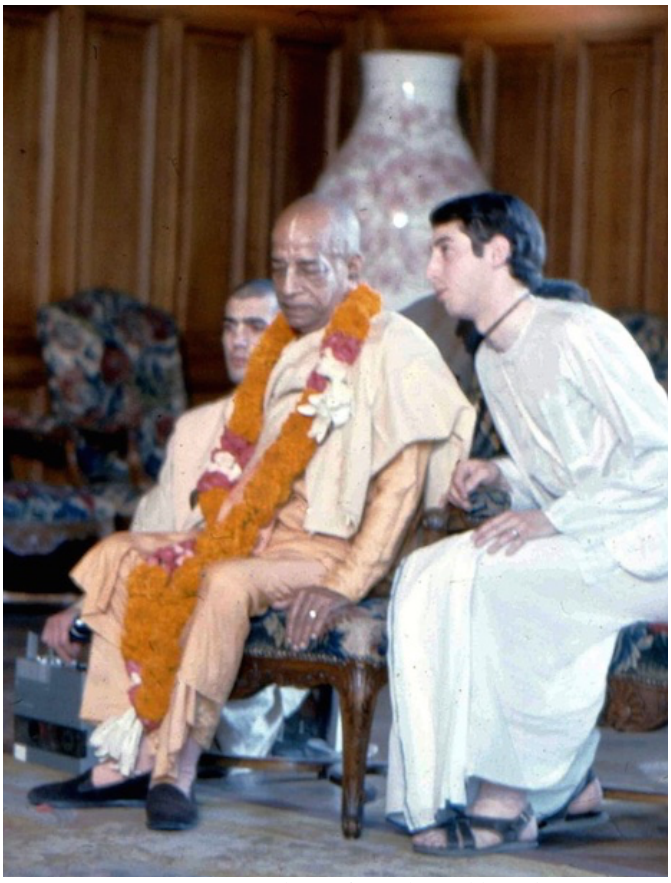
Anyway, there is a myriad more rules governing the recommended procedures and protocols for a "proper" marriage to take place; and then a variety of instructions on how to live as a couple, for instance: "He shall not eat with his wife; nor shall he look at her while she is eating, or snoring, or yawning, or sitting at her ease." (Ms 4.43) A commentator offers (among many other considerations): "if he sees her while eating, when she may be opening her mouth wide, she may look ugly and thus fail to please her husband. '*Snoring*'—is the sound made by the nose filled with the wind passing down from the head. Here also the disfiguring of the face is likely to make the husband displeased. '*Yawning*'—the prolonged breathing out of air with the mouth, or the spreading out of the body and limbs. This also is undesirable on the said grounds." But I guess such injunctions tally with traditional guidelines for ladylike behavior in various civilizations.

Interdependence and Irrelevance

The point I am making is simple: each norm and practice has some justification, some logical, biological, or social underpinning; but many (if not most) of these rules are valuable or relevant only in a restricted socio-cultural environment. Some

of these customs remain heavily dependent on the presence of a multitude of factors to be truly applicable or beneficial. Those *activating elements* are missing in the twenty-first century, also in India, therefore, according to a literal reading of the Manu-samhita, practically nobody is qualified to do anything; virtually everyone is simply fallen and degraded. Therefore (thank God!) the Gaudiya *acaryas*, and especially Srila Prabhupada, who personally brought Krishna consciousness to the Western shores, completely disregard the quicksand complications and intricate conventions of the Manu-samhita. They go to the essence, surpassing such byzantine *dharma-sastra* injunctions. By following the Great Purifier, the Supreme, Divine Patita-pavana, Lord Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu, the Gaudiya teachers transform people's lives and karmic trajectories, wiping out eons of conditioning by the potency of the holy name. We can extract some valuable ideas from the Manu-samhita, but we should remain focused on the essence of Vaisnavism. Srila Prabhupada explains in a conversation:

Yogeśvara [translating from French]**:** He says: "Does this Kṛṣṇa consciousness message apply as well to the outcastes? … the untouchables? …



Yogeśvara translating for Srila Prabhupada

Prabhupāda: Outcaste means those who are less than the *śūdras*. They are called *pañcamas* … But for us, Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement, there is no such distinction. Anyone can become Kṛṣṇa conscious. The *pañcamas*, the fifth-class men, are called *caṇḍālas* … [Srila Prabhupada has a disciple read Bg 9.32] **"O son of Pṛthā, those who take shelter in Me, though they be of lower birth—women, *vaiśyas* (merchants), as well as *śūdras* (workers)—can approach the supreme destination."**

Prabhupāda: So in Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement there is no such distinction, because we are interested with the soul. The soul is the same

everywhere, and these designations are different. So Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement is above designation …

Yogeśvara [translating from French]: He says this seems to be somewhat different from the traditional Hindu practice, since in the *Manu-saṁhitā*, for example, *śūdras* are not to be instructed.

Prabhupāda: Yes, but we do not keep him *śūdra*. A devotee is no longer *śūdra*. We are creating *brāhmins*. Just like these Europeans and Americans. They, according to *Manu-saṁhitā*, they are *mlecchas, yavanas*. But we are not keeping them *mleccha* and *yavanas*. Just like these European and American boys … they are no more *śūdras* or *caṇḍālas*. They are *brāhmins*. So it is said, *guṇa-karma-vibhāgaśaḥ* (Bg 4.13), according to quality and work. When one is educated in the quality of *brāhmin*, Vaiṣṇava, and he works like a *brāhmin*, he is no longer *śūdra* or *caṇḍāla* or *yavana*. He is *brāhmin*, or Vaiṣṇava.

(Conversation, Geneva, 5 June 1974)

The Manu-samhita dogmatists may cringe, but Lord Caitanya's mercy will fully act. The Manu-samhita zealots may bark, but the Gadiya-vaisnava caravan will pass.

What's Wrong with the Manu-samhita? Part 9: "The Train Has Left the Station"

Those who take seriously the *dharma-sastra* texts (as all Vaisnavas should, but with proper discrimination) should consider the following passage at the beginning of *Parasara Smriti* (a book Srila Prabhupada also quoted): "For the Krita [Satya-yuga] are suited the laws of Manu; for the Treta, those by Gautama (are) prescribed; for the Dvapara those by Shank and Likhita; for the Kali, those by Parasara are prescribed." (PS 1.24) In other words, according to this text, attributed to Vyasadeva's father, the Manu-samhita was for Satya-yuga, not for our times. Conclusion: the childish neo-smartas immaturely pushing (what's left of) the Manu-samhita onto Gaudiya-vaisnavism are behind by a couple of *yugas*. Someone should inform them that, according to *Parasara Smriti,* the "Manu-samhita Train" has left the station more than 2 millions years ago.

Liubomir Turcanu asked, in a somewhat challenging mood: **"How do you then explain Srila Prabhupada's instructions on usage of Manu Samhita? ... "if we want real peace and order in the human society, WE MUST FOLLOW the principles laid down by the *Manu-saṁhitā* and confirmed by the Supreme Personality of Godhead, Kṛṣṇa.'"**

Beautiful quote (from the purport to SB 7.8.48, by the way). Let's analyze it (emphasis mine): **"we must follow THE PRINCIPLES laid down by the Manu-saṁhitā."** There are principles and details. Srila Prabhupada upheld the principles, not necessarily the details. For instance, the Manu-samhita emphasizes *guru-kula* education, which Srila Prabhupada established and promoted, but without incorporating some of the specifics given in Manu-samhita, such as the idea that *brahmacaris* of different castes should use different mantras when begging alms. Another important consideration: in the purport Srila Prabhupada says that (emphasis mine) **"we must follow the principles laid down by the *Manu-saṁhitā* AND CONFIRMED BY THE SUPREME PERSONALITY OF GODHEAD, KṚṢṆA."** We should carefully scrutinize which teachings in Manu-samhita align with the instructions of Lord Krishna in the *Gita* and in the *Bhagavatam*. When something in the Manu-samhita matches what Krishna declares and endorses, yes, we should embrace it; but when the ideas don't tally, we should stick to the *Gita* and the *Bhagavatam*. For instance: Krishna says in *Bhagavad-gita* (4.13) that *varnas* are determined by *guna* and *karma*, qualities and actions/occupations. When we see that the Manu-samhita instead endorses castes by birth (*asura-varnasrama*), we should disregard, discard, and disown it.

Liubomir Turcanu also wrote: "In any case we should always apply *shastra* principles according to time, place and circumstance. Not letter for letter. For example, detailed instructions for *vanaprastha/sannyasa ashrama* for Treta/Dvapara-yugas are not applicable in Kali-yuga. We should extract the principles and apply them to our situation instead of trying to imitate Vedic standards for other *yugas*."

I agree.

Someone else openly challenged: "Kaunteya Das, from where do you get the authority to say that all the present Manu samhitas are not bona fide? Will you after some time use the same argument with the *Bhagavad-gita* and *Srimad-Bhagavatam*? If Srila Prabhupada, who was directly in communication with Krishna while writing his purports, has accepted the Manu Samhita, who are you to contradict the

Founder-*Acharya* of Lord Caitanya's *Sankitan* Movement?" OK, let's address the various questions:

1. If there are various versions, they cannot all be possibly identical to the original; and how much from the original version is left in each is debatable. From where I do I "get the authority" to question the integrity of the text? From Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakura, for instance, who wrote in the introduction of the *Kṛṣṇa-saṁhitā*: **"The *varṇāśrama* system continued purely for a long time … [but later] the procedure of judging *varṇa* by birth became fixed. In time, this system of *varṇas* without reference to nature entered covertly in the *Manu-saṁhitā* and other scriptures."**

2. Will I start questioning the integrity of the text of the *Gita* and the *Bhagavatam*? No, first because the *acaryas* have accepted them as unadulterated. Second, even secular scholars recognize that the *Bhagavatam*, despite its size and age, stayed remarkably unchanged. The minuscule differences found in various manuscripts are inconsequential. The authenticity and accuracy of both *Gita* and *Bhagavatam* are not in question within the *sampradaya*, and so I don't plan to address such a non-issue.

3. Srila Prabhupada, the commenter says, "accepted the Manu-samhita"—am I contradicting him? No, of course not. He wrote that, **"Svāyambhuva Manu is the leader of mankind, and he has given a book called Manu-saṁhitā."** (SB 8.1.16, purport). I don't question this account, but we should wonder: how much is left of that book, a couple of billion years later? Or how much is left of the version by Vaisvavata Manu, from some 120 million years ago? And even if we had the originals, how much of them would be relevant and applicable today? Plus, Srila Prabhupada himself relativized the importance of the Manu-samhita, for instance by saying that it's a *karma-kanda* text (SB 6.1.7, purport). He even said that Manu-samhita is **"not religion"** but only **"moral principles"** (Morning Walk, Hyderabad, 20 April 1974). Who are we to contradict Srila Prabhupada? Who are we to raise the Manu-samhita to a status Srila Prabhupada never intended for it to occupy? Who would better pass the test of loyalty: someone who, cautiously considering all evidence, relegates the present edition of Manu-samhita to a lower level of genuineness and authority, or someone who mindlessly,

fanatically, and irresponsibly promotes it within the Vaisnava community as an immaculate and entirely relevant *sastra*?

What's Wrong with Manu-samhita? Part 10 – "Contradictions Abound"

Scholars and others have been pointing out inconsistencies and contradictions within the text. Gandhi, for instance, wrote: "I hold Manusmriti as part of Shastras. But that does not mean that I swear by every verse that is printed in the book described as Manusmriti. There are so many contradictions in the printed volume that, if you accept one part, you are bound to reject those parts that are wholly inconsistent with it. ... Nobody is in possession of the original text."[12]

Professor Patrick Olivelle

I am extensively quoting from his work, "Manu's Code of Law - A Critical Edition and Translation of the Manava Dharmasastra." As far as I know, this is the only critical edition of the Manu-samhita, aiming at presenting the text as accurately as possible, based on carefully examining all available sources. Olivelle is likely the greatest living expert on Manu-samhita and I am personally very grateful for his scholarly effort, as his research and analysis clarify a lot of issues. Olivelle writes that writing his book took some thirteen years, and that if he had known how much time and energy it would have taken, he would not have started the project. Just to give an idea: his wife, Suman Olivelle, learned eight different scripts to explore and compare all existing versions. But now, due to their mammoth effort we have a masterpiece of 1,142 pages. Olivelle is an Indologist, a philologist and scholar of Sanskrit literature; he has been Professor of Sanskrit and Indian Religions in the Department of Asian Studies at the University of Texas at Austin since 1991. Among other things, he is also Senior Fellow at the Oxford Centre for Hindu Studies.[13]

[12] *Hinduism According to Gandhi,* page 129.

[13] https://ochs.org.uk/prof-patrick-olivelle/

I submitted to him the first draft of this book, requesting a review. With humility (and with the neutrality typical of the scholar) he replied: "I am in no position to evaluate a book like this, but I know it must take courage and conviction to take contrary and controversial positions within a religious group like yours."

Nah, *everyone* in ISKCON will love and welcome an honest attempt at exploring the facts.

Discrepancies

Prof. Olivelle acknowledges the presence of inconsistencies: "Manu does, indeed, cite conflicting opinions … See the various opinions on lawful marriages (3.23-6), on meat eating (5.28-56), levirate (9.57-70), division of property and primogeniture (9.105-56), whether brothers should live together or separately (9.104—11), and shares of a son by a Sudra wife (9.150—5). See also Manu's denunciation of bride-price at 9.98-100 and its acceptance at 8.366, 369; 9.93-7, 204-5."[14]

Notwithstanding, Olivelle offers insights that, to some extent, explain and mitigate the contradictions. Here I am quoting him at length for a fuller appreciation of the issues: "We may be able … to distinguish two voices of Manu, the legal and the moral, which may also have contributed to apparent contradictions. As a jurist he has to deal with the reality of social life and accepted custom; he has to decide whether certain actions are legal or not … Nevertheless, dharma is not just law but also right living, and when he uses the moral voice Manu often contradicts what he may have said within a legal context. Even today, for example, opposition to birth out of wedlock (the moral position) can exist side by side with legal and social provisions for the welfare and legal status of illegitimate children. We see such a bifurcation in Manu's discussion of permitted foods (5.4-26), where meat-eating is taken for granted. His discussion of food at an ancestral offering (3.267-72) also presupposes meat. His discussion of permitted foods, however, is

[14] *Manu's Code of Law*, page 30.

followed by a long statement about the evils of meat (5.27-55). Clearly, Manu here is not so much contradicting himself as providing two sets of guidelines ... The moral tone is clearly brought out at the end of Manu's long discussion on food (5.56): 'There is no fault in eating meat, in drinking liquor, or in having sex; that is the natural activity of creatures. Abstaining from such activity, however, brings great rewards.'"[15]

This also underlines the limited relevance of Manu-samhita for practicing Vaisnavas. *Sadhakas* won't consider meat-eating and drinking alcohol as acceptable parts of their lifestyle, although they realistically acknowledge that people in general are often addicted to those habits. Olivelle continues: "In both ritual and legal texts, there are often two sets of rules, the one primary (kalpa) and the other secondary (anukalpa). The primary rules are seen as the normal and the normative. In times of emergency and when it is impossible to follow the primary rule due to lack of resources or ability, it is permitted to follow the secondary mode ... Sometimes, as at 3.147, Manu clearly identifies the primary and the secondary methods. Indeed, at 11.30 Manu condemns a man who follows the secondary rule when he is able to follows the primary: 'When someone, though able to follow the principal mode, yet lives according to the secondary mode, that fool will obtain no reward for it after death.' The two modes, however, are not always so clearly distinguished, and in those situations the differing rules may seem to be contradictory."[16]

In other words, a clear, unambiguous direction may easily evade the reader. Haphazardly citing a verse or a section ("The Manu-samhita says such and such!") can create serious confusion. One more angle from Olivelle on why we find inconsistencies in the text: "A major reason for apparent contradiction, as well as for the many nonsequiturs, that we detect in ancient Indian texts such as the *MDh* [*Manava Dharmasastra*, another name for Manu-samhita] is the technique of text production that I will call 'anthologizing' ... In anthologizing, the author opts to place material drawn from different sources side by side without much editorial intervention or any serious attempt at reconciling differences among these textual extracts ... Doniger (1991, lv) also thinks that Manu presents the traditions he has inherited, 'juxtaposing conflicting views and then adjudicating between them.' Manu, however, juxtaposes far more frequently than he adjudicates."[17]

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[15] *Manu's Code of Law*, page 31. This verse, 5.56, was quoted by Srila Prabhupada several times.

[16] *Manu's Code of Law*, page 33.

[17] *Manu's Code of Law*, page 33.

Contradictory juxtapositions placed side-by-side (anthologizing) don't help in identifying a conclusive standard. It may not be a *damning* feature, but, if we intend the text for practical implementation, it's certainly a problem. More interpretations and more cross-referencing would be needed for functional implementation; all such deliberations may further divert and detach us from the content of the codes, making them less dependable and more… remote. The contradictions in the text remain a serious hurdle for those wishing to *use* the Manu-samhita as an operational legal and religious handbook.

One more insightful elaboration by Patrick Olivelle on the incongruencies in the text: "A final reason for apparent contradictions may be found in the frequent use of hyperbole in didactic literature … A quick glance at the royal panegyrics (*praśastis*) of a millennium later is instructive. All kings, from petty chieftains to Gupta emperors, are eulogized as conquerors of the whole world. One would hardly expect the panegyrist to be accurate—he is a petty king, a tributary to king X; he managed a couple of small-scale victories! That would hardly do. Neither can you go to god X and say 'You are in the third rank below Y and Z. And by the way, will you give me a thousand cows?' Even in the Catholic faith, where theological orthodoxy takes center stage, devotees of the Virgin or St. Jude do not give theologically accurate descriptions of the powers of their favorite saint; hyperbole is the norm. The vedic poets were no exception. This form of rhetoric was recognized as an *alaṅkāra*, a poetic ornament, in Sanskrit aesthetics under the name *atiśayokti*, hyperbole. In hyperbole, the literal is the enemy of the true … The use of hyperbole in religious and didactic literature is clearly different from its use in poetry. There is, however, one thing in common; neither can be taken at face value or read literally without distorting the language, misunderstanding the meaning, and producing interpretive monstrosities like 'henotheism.'[18] In religious literature we have statements that giving a cow to a learned Brahmin is worth one thousand horse sacrifices, or bathing in a particular river is better than bathing ten thousand times in the Ganges at Benares. In attempting to inculcate the virtue of abstention from meat, Manu (5.53) says: 'A man who abstains from meat and a man who offers the horse sacrifice every

[18] The worship of one god without denying the existence of other gods.

year for a hundred years—the reward for their meritorious acts is the same' … As in literature and poetry, so in religious, didactic, and legal literature hyperbole is simply a literary device. Failure to recognize this can only cause serious misinterpretation of texts."[19] Inexperienced devotees may easily fall prey to the hyperbolic elocutions of the text, taking them as accurate, precise affirmations. Such mix-ups can generate untold bewilderment and disorientation in both pragmatic and socio-theological matters. Can we have a "Manu-samhita As It Is"? I doubt it, as the style of the composition and the complex, multi-layered interplay of judgements don't support direct and unambiguous conclusions.

Olivelle concludes, "I do not propose that *all* apparent contradictions in the *MDh* can be resolved in these ways. Authors, even modern ones, do contradict themselves occasionally. Further, the work of redactors down the centuries … cannot be completely detected. Changing norms and mores may have prompted some of them to introduce opinions at variance with those expressed in the original text."[20] Colloquially speaking, wading through the Manu-samhita in search of definite norms, rules, and guidance can easily turn into a truly messy and inconclusive affair.

Khonika Gope asked: "Was there ever a time in history when Manusmriti was followed to the dot? Do we have any records? Wasn't it always a book of suggestions and not a strict law book?"

My answer: "If we take 'Manusmriti' to mean the book considered to have been compiled some 2,000 years ago in North India, I am not aware of any instance in which it "was followed to the dot. (It would also be difficult to define 'followed to the dot' as often is not clear what the injunctions exactly were.) But if we take 'Manusmriti' to mean the codes of law promulgated by the Manus in each *manvantara* (original texts that we can't access anymore), I believe it's much more likely that there have been times, in ancient ages, in which they might have been 'followed to the dot.'"

Protracted Protestations

Instead of engendering gratitude for Olivelle's herculean efforts, mentioning him and his research produced a strong feeling of rejection in a certain devotee. He wrote, among other things: "An intelligent person and especially a devotee needs

[19] *Manu's Code of Law*, page 33.

[20] *Manu's Code of Law*, page 36.

to talk with the real practitioners of these books, not only theoreticians." "Practitioners of these books"!? Who are the "practitioners" of Manu-samhita today? Is there any judge actively sentencing based on Manu-samhita? Is there anyone rigorously following its regulations? *Everyone* presently engaged with the book would practically fall in the category of "theoreticians."

That devotee continued: "I find it rather strange that you appeal to the authority of a non gaudiya-vaishnava person and promote his views." Learned readers will immediately recognize the ad-hominem fallacy, rejecting some points not because of their being demonstrably inaccurate, but because who is expressing them. It's simply an attack on the status of the person, in this case branded dismissively as "a non gaudiya-vaishnava" (as if that was a fundamental ineligibility to talk about ancient Indian books). I replied: "Are you suggesting that ISKCON should reject and avoid experts who have dedicated decades to studying a particular subject, just because they may not be Gaudiya-vaisnavas? In, say, consulting an Ayurvedic physician, would Srila Prabhupada reject and avoid any doctor who was not a Gaudiya-vaisnava? … Simply saying that we shouldn't hear from him because he is not a card-carrying Gaudiya-vaisnava doesn't carry much weight."

With unbending tenacity, the devotee kept arguing: "No. I do NOT suggest rejecting and avoiding any expert who has dedicated decades to studying a particular subject. I suggest avoiding a non-vaishnava expert in promoting his critique of shastra that Srila Prabhupada recommended devotees to follow to some extent."

But Srila Prabhupada himself expressed a "critique" of the Manu-samhita; should we reject him too?

I wrote on the Facebook thread: "If you find anything objectionable in what I shared, in what I quoted from Olivelle's book, please feel free and encouraged to share your concerns. Let us know what you disagree with and why." The devotee replied: "I disagree with his presentation of contradictions and inconsistencies in Manu-samhita as absolutely valid because he is not a practicing vaishnava." Again the ad-hominem attack… Also, should we consider "as absolutely valid" whatever any "practicing vaishnava" says? Do practicing Vaisnavas magically attain an infallible status? This approach appears indefensible: substituting religious affiliation for verifiable standards of evidence. If Olivelle patiently and systematically shows that there are inconsistencies and contradictions in the Manu-samhita, what are we

to do? Just reject the fact because he is "a non-Vaisnava"? (By the way, I do not know what's Olivelle's theological persuasion. As far as I am concerned, he might identify as a Vaisnava; I just don't know.)

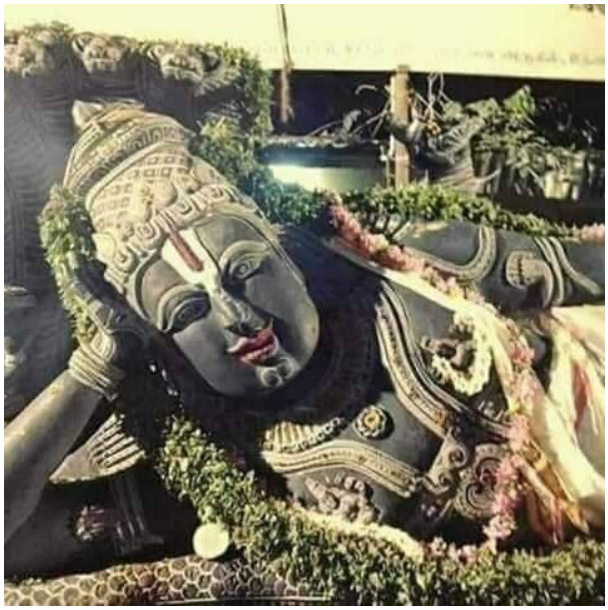
At one point, academic Jagat Palana Das interjected: "By the way, I used Olivelle's translations of the Upanishads at University."

But the protesting devotee had a theory: "If we start listening to such 'experts' on Bhagavatam and Chaitanya Charitamrita, then very soon we will reject the whole Krishna consciousness philosophy as being created by 'some unknown brahmana 2000 years ago.'"

Wow. Is our faith so pliable, are our historical substantiations so weak, and are these "experts" so persuasive that just by listening to them "we will reject the whole Krishna consciousness philosophy" as a recent creation? Intellectually, this devotee seems to live under siege, experiencing a frantic frenzy of insecurity. Does he have nightmares of hordes of evil Indologists confronting him, bent on destroying his *bhakti*?

Of course, I am not suggesting that devotees indiscriminately lend their ears to every intellectual who has a theory on Indian textual traditions. Some may be indeed motivated by visceral revisionism and instinctive antagonism. But that devotee is categorical: "If we're discussing the value and authority of shastra, better to consult those who try to live by it and realize it—not those who dissect it with scalpels of doubt."

Falling into circular reasoning, he is basically saying: "I don't want to listen to Olivelle on Manu-samhita because he is trying to 'dissect it with scalpels of doubt.'" The idea relies on the unproven premise. Olivelle painstakingly researched all available manuscripts and reported what those manuscripts say, including the attribution of the original dissemination to Brahma, who "taught this treatise to his son, Manu, and he in turn taught it to his pupils, including Bhrgu." The text is theistic in nature and Olivelle's translation clearly reflects and reports that, as in this excerpt from the first chapter: "There was this world—pitch-dark, indiscernible, without distinguishing marks, unthinkable, incomprehensible, in a kind of deep sleep all over. Then the Self-existent Lord appeared—the Unmanifest manifesting this world beginning with the elements, projecting his might, and dispelling the



darkness. That One—who is beyond the range of senses; who cannot be grasped; who is subtle, unmanifest, and eternal; who contains all beings; and who transcends thought—it is he who shone forth on his own. As he focused his thought with the desire of bringing forth diverse creatures from his own body, it was the waters that he first brought forth … The waters are called 'Nara' … Because his first sojourn (ayana) was in them, tradition calls him 'Narayana.'"

Olivelle collates the various existing manuscripts, analyzing them according to his Indological training focused on philology. It's not the method of "descending knowledge" as primarily promoted by the acaryas, and I am not saying we should blindly accept whatever he says, but we should neither blindly reject everything he wrote, especially without serious, professional, and open-minded scrutiny.

At one point I told the objecting devotee, specifically about the dating of the present Manu-samhiita: "If you don't accept Olivelle's dating, feel free to propose a better one, otherwise your ad-hominem attack has no substance whatsoever." What's the point of disagreeing a priori, without offering an alternative? I also reminded him: "By the way, it's not just scholars who relativize the present text of Manu-samhita." Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakura, for instance, also accepted that the text was conceptually corrupted, its original social blueprint was significantly perverted.

Anyway, this is a short except of my exchanges with that complaining devotee. I appreciate that he wants to remain faithful to the tradition and keep respecting what the spiritual authorities presented as sastra, but I object to an obscurantist, tortoise-like approach based on fear. At one point I wrote him: "Thank you for giving so much time and energy to this topic. If you want to (try to) use the Manu-samhita in your service, who am I to stop you? Good luck … If we want to touch Manu-samhita at all, we need a serious re-interpretation of the text." After so much back and forth, there was a glimpse of agreement as he granted: "I do agree that we need serious re-interpretation of it where its principles are adapted to modern time, place and circumstance."

At one point Prem Dharma Anuragui Ardila asked: "Why any Gaudiya would want to study or follow non-Gaudiya scriptures? Is the Hari Bhakti Vilasa and the entire Goswami grantha not enough? Why give priority to other things before our own Purva Acharyas amrita?" I replied: "Yes, in one sense that's the point of this series of postings; at the same time BECAUSE our acaryas quote the Manu-samhita, we need to clarify what's its 'tattva' within the Gaudiya-vaisnava hierarchy of references; but, otherwise, yes, we are not going to learn the highest esoteric truths of the process of *uttama-bhakti* from it."

What's Wrong with Manu-samhita? Part 11 – "In Bed with the Monster"

In a paper on their website, the self-styled "ISKCON India Scholars Board" not only quotes the Manu-samhita several times, but they also cite the atheist Medhatithi's commentary as authoritative! Some readers may wonder, "Who the heck is this Medhatithi?" Well, hardly anything is known about him.[21] In his *The Classical Law of India*, legal scholar Robert Lingat states, "one knows nothing about him save that he lived in Kashmir" and even that is not universally accepted. More important than his domicile, though, it's Medhatithi's worldview. Sri Vaisnava writer Keshav Srinivasan defines Medhatithi as a "Purva Mimamsa philosopher." Pūrva-mīmāṁsā, or Karma-mīmāṁsā, is Vedic atheism. Hridayananda Maharaja explains: **"Karma-mīmāṁsā … basically, is atheism with a belief in reincarnation."** (SB 10.24.13, purport) In a later chapter, he further elaborates: **"Jaimini Ṛṣi, in his *Pūrva-mīmāṁsā-sūtras*, presents material work and its results as the whole of reality (*vipaṇam ṛtam*). He and later proponents of Karma-mīmāṁsā philosophy teach that material existence is endless—that there is no**

[21] One thing should be clear: he is not the homonymous sage mentioned in the *Bhagavatam*.

liberation. For them the cycle of karma is perpetual, and the best one can aim for is higher birth among the demigods. Therefore, they say, the whole purpose of the Vedas is to engage human beings in rituals for creating good karma." (SB 10.87.25, purport)

Medhatithi shows his true colors as an inveterate atheist in his visceral rejection of the entire first chapter of the Manu-samhita, which frames the whole work within a theistic theological scaffolding, starting with a monotheistic description of creation. Medhatithi loathes that. He writes: "Where did we start? And where have we ended? He [Manu] was asked the dharmas prescribed in the sastras, and he indeed promised to explain them. To then describe the world in its unmanifest state is both irrelevant and serves no human purpose … With regard to this matter, there is neither an authoritative basis nor does it serve any purpose. Therefore, this entire chapter should not be studied."[22] Medhatithi wishes to dismantle and disband the whole theocentric approach of the Manu-samhita.

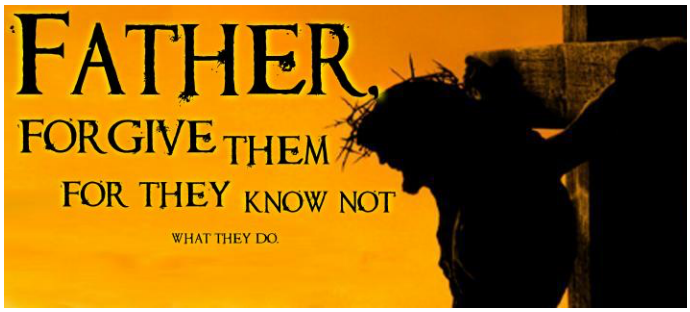
The karma-mimamsakas want to enjoy the world without bothering with the concept of a personal, all-controlling God. Medhatithi adds: "This subject (of Creation and Dissolution) … shall be [described] in some places in accordance with the Purāṇas and sometimes in accordance with the Sāṅkhya doctrines. But the knowing or not knowing of those details does not make any difference in *Right* and *Wrong.*"[23] For a purva-mimamsaka God is irrelevant because God doesn't exist in a Vedantic and Gita sense as the source of everything, as permeating everything, and as the last judge of right and wrong; in fact, for a purva-mimamsaka God doesn't exist at all. Medhatithi abhors and rejects the whole discussion, practically saying, "Who needs this 'God-created-the-world stuff'?! Let's get to the part about rules and regulations; the dos and don'ts; let's forget about this creation myth. It's irrelevant to our jurisprudential deliberations." Thus, he clearly shows his visceral aversion, his deep-seated allergy to a treatise of law acknowledging that principles of justice are originated by and dependent on the divine plan of a transcendent, personal Deity. 'Nārāyaṇa' is specifically mentioned in 1.10, but for Medhatithi this whole "personal creator" business is just semantics; for him between Brahma, Visnu, and Siva there is no differentiation or hierarchy. He comments on Ms 1.10: "[T]he mere difference in names does not necessarily imply difference in the things denoted; so

[22] From Medhatithi's commentary to Ms 1.5, translation by Patrick Olivelle, *Manu's Code of Law*, page 52.

[23] From Medhatithi's commentary to 1.5, translation by Ganganath Jha.

that the Beings described under the names '*Brahmā*,' '*Nārāyana*' and '*Maheśvara'* are one and the same; though they form the objects of diverse forms of worship, yet they do not differ among themselves."[24] For a karma-mīmāṃsaka the uttara-mīmāṃsaka conception of *Viṣṇu-tattva*, *Śiva-tattva*, and *jīva-tattva* is all superfluous semantics; and the Vaisnava-Vedantic philosophy of *śakti-pariṇāma-vāda* is unadulterated anathema.

Clearly, Medhatithi is only interested in clarifying a set of laws for an orderly society, one in which he and his godless Karma-mimamsa colleagues can focus on performing Vedic rituals to ensure prosperity in this life and then get to heaven, to obtain higher-grade sensual enjoyment, in an unending cycle of karma within an unending, non-theistic cosmos. The mīmāṃsakas thus compulsively focus on ritual (just like the smartas). They constitute one of the traditional inimical groups of Vaisnava Vedantists (just like the smartas). Although distasteful to the highest degree, it's not surprising to see the pseudo-scholars of the "ISKCON India Scholars Board" irresponsibly promoting the Manu-samhita and even endorsing an atheistic commentary. This betrayal of the *sampradaya* would be scandalous if done purposefully. We only hope that their serious blunders can be attributed simply to their abysmal philosophical incompetence, already demonstrated on so many occasions. In that case, in which their sheer ignorance is the true culprit, for their benefit we borrow and invoke Jesus' prayer while on the cross: "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing" (Luke 23:34).



The other option, that they are knowingly disseminating anti-theistic commentaries, is too bleak to contemplate; too aberrant to conceive. I like to think that there must a limit to the malice of the neo-smartas. Deliberately promoting Karma-mīmāṃsa messages would cross all conceivable boundaries of decency, and so I prefer to ascribe their unqualifiable blooper to their lack of preparation. And it's puzzling that no one among the dozen or so members of the "Scholars Board," all of whom collectively signed the paper, saw anything wrong with quoting Medhatithi as an authority. What kind of "scholarship" is that?

[24] Translation by Ganganath Jha

What's Wrong with Manu-samhita? Part 12 – "The Catch-22"

The text is clear: only the male twice-born (*brahmanas*, *ksatriyas*, or *vaisyas* by birth) are eligible to study the Manu-samhita:

niṣekādiśmaśānānto mantrairyasyodito vidhiḥ |
tasya śāstre'dhikāro'smin jñeyo nānyasya kasya cit

"That person alone, and none other, should be regarded as entitled to the scripture, for whom the sacraments beginning with conception and ending with the crematorium, are prescribed as to be done with mantras." (Ms 2.16)

And this is Olivelle's translation of the same verse: "A man for whom it is prescribed that the rites beginning with the impregnation ceremony and ending with the funeral are to be performed with the recitation of vedic formulas—no one but he is to be recognized as entitled to study this treatise."

The specification that the book can be accessed only by those whose *samskaras* should be done with Vedic mantras excludes women and *sudras*, whose *samskaras*, according to the Manu-samhita, should be performed without mantras. In other words, half of humanity (the female part) is a priori banned from reading the Manu-samhita (sorry, ladies). Males are only permitted access if born as *dvijas*. Those born as *sudras* (most humans, including the leading "scholars" of the self-styled "ISKCON India Scholars Board") are prohibited to study the text—by the Manu-samhita itself.

Srila Prabhupada spoke multiple times about the *garbhādhāna-saṁskāra* (more than one hundred entries in Vanipedia), as an essential requirement for being considered a *brahmana*, a *ksatriya*, or a *vaisya* by birth: **"The *garbhādhāna-saṁskāra* ... if it is not observed, then any child born, either in the *brāhmiṇ* family or *kṣatriya* family or *vaiśya* family, because the *garbhādhāna-saṁskāra* is not observed, it is to be understood that that child is *śūdra*."** (Lecture on Bg 7.11-13, Bombay, 5 April 1971)

According to the Manu-samhita, those individuals cannot study the Manu-samhita. It's as simple as that. I wonder: how many of the parents of today's (male) Manu-samhita enthusiasts performed *garbhādhāna-saṁskāra*? If they didn't (by far the most likely scenario) those devotees shouldn't study the Manu-samhita; by reading it, they openly violate the prohibition. Their reading is illegitimate and unauthorized;

completely unlawful. So, we are facing a Catch-22 situation: Manu-samhita aficionados can't even read it if their parents, a) were not *dvijas*, or b) their parents were *dvijas* but have not performed the impregnation ritual. Most Manu-samhita zealots, if sincere, can't even touch the book. All their supercilious pontifications on the text are unauthorized sermons based on defiance and insubordination to the text they advocate. We must conclude that the almost totality of Manu-samhita evangelism boils down to hypocritical pretension (or as an expression of bleak ignorance of the text so fervently promoted). The Manu-samhita bigots are disobeying not only their beloved Manu-samhita, but also Srila Prabhupada, who said: **"You cannot touch the *Manu-samhita*, what to speak of translating it. So if you try to follow the *Manu-samhita* then you become a *mleccha* and *yavana* and your career is finished."** (Letter to Madhusudana, by Tamal Krishna Gosvami, reporting Srila Prabhupada's words, 19 May 1977)

The usual contrarian protested: "The Catch-22 effect is also present in Srimad-Bhagavatam which 'is intended for paramahamsas' (SB 2.9.18). But it doesn't mean we can't study it to become one. Just like MS."

I publish such comments because they represent real-life examples of how some devotees react when they hear about issues with the Manu-samhita, or as in this case, with its accessibility. Addressing such objections offer a chance to clarify and, hopefully, remove doubts:

1. The expression "is intended for paramahamsas" is a distortion of **"is meant for the *paramahaṁsas*"** (SB 2.9.18, purport)—but that's a detail.
2. What's more important is that, *in that same purport*, Srila Prabhupada explains that the **"path of the *paramahaṁsa*"** is open to **"any person"**; that path includes hearing about Krishna **"from the text of the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam.*"** Therefore, the idea that only *paramahaṁsas* can legitimate access the *Bhāgavatam* is simply untrue.
3. Any learned Vaisnava could stack up multiple logical and scriptural arguments to address the false idea that reading the *Bhāgavatam* should be exclusively reserved for *paramahaṁsas.* The *Bhāgavatam* repeatedly presents itself as the scripture for the whole humanity. For instance: **"Persons who have lost their vision due to the dense darkness of ignorance in the Age of Kali shall get light from this Purāṇa."** (SB 1.3.43) and **"**[material miseries can be mitigated by *bhakti-yoga*] **But the mass of people do not know this, and therefore the learned Vyāsadeva compiled this Vedic literature."** (SB 1.7.6)

4. The Manu-samhita is different: such restrictions on accessing and presenting it were intended to be followed, even enforced. The book demands a rigid, inflexible caste system. For instance: "If through arrogance, he [the *śūdra*] teaches *brāhmaṇas* their duty, the king shall pour heated oil into his mouth and ears." (Ms 8.272) Not exactly a… democratic attitude.

Someone may ask me, "But what about you? You were born in Italy from non-Hindu parents, and they certainly didn't perform any *garbhādhāna-saṁskāra*. But you are quoting verse after verse from the Manu-samhita, and you are writing a whole book about it! Aren't you also insolently transgressive, with the aggravating factor that *you are aware* of the prohibition to access the book?"

My reply: "I don't accept the available version as unadulterated, original, or binding for practitioners of *bhakti-yoga*; therefore, I am not morally bound to follow its restrictions. If you take the (whole) book as authentic, you (most probably) cannot read it; but those, like me, who don't accept the present text as sacrosanct, aren't obliged to abide by every one of its stipulations, particularly those not endorsed by the *acaryas*. I am only required to follow the instructions of Srila Prabhupada, not the anachronistic (and often interpolated) injunctionns of this or that *dharma-sastra*."

It's the Catch-22 in reverse. If you believe the Manu-samhita is perfect, you (most probably) can't touch it; but if you don't take it as impeccable, you can study it. I am attempting to serve Srila Prabhupada's followers by elaborating on why, as a general statement, he declared that devotees **"cannot touch the *Manu-samhita*"**; My intention is educational and *homeopathic*.

We are facing an emergency; we are witnessing a vigorous neo-smarta propaganda subtly eroding allegiance to the primary Gaudiya sastras, to the teachings of our *acaryas*. I am adding my voice to the fight, but I am fully conscious that others can and will do a much better job in defending the *sampradaya*. So, yes, I am perusing the Manu-samhita, which according to a literal interpretation of the text I shouldn't be doing, but I have no reason to accept that restriction as normative or binding. And although I am reading from the Manu-samhita, I have zero intention to advocate its wholesale adoption: in fact, just the opposite.

Liubomir Turcanu suggested: “Instead of spending so much time on proving that Manu-samhita cannot be used today by devotees and society at large, why not develop a similar code based on Srila Prabhupada's and our acharyas' instructions?”

My reply: “Not a bad idea; but my present efforts aim at explaining why such a ‘new code’ would be necessary, as apparently someone believes we can just use the Manu-samhita.” The project of creating an alternative system of jurisprudence is way beyond the scope of my present, humble, and imperfect effort. In fact, as explained in the Appendixes, it may time several lifetimes of efforts by much more qualified individuals than I to craft a workable Vaisnava lawbook. But stay tuned, isn’t ISKCON meant to rewrite history, sooner or later?

What’s Wrong with Manu-samhita? Part 13 – “The Yuga-dharma is… What?!”

According to the Manu-samhita (1.86), in Kali-yuga the highest virtue is achieved by charity:

tapaḥ paraṃ kṛtayuge tretāyāṃ jñānamucyate
dvāpare yajñamevāhurdānamekaṃ kalau yuge

“In the Kṛta Cycle [Satya-yuga], ‘Austerity’ is the highest; in the Tretā ‘knowledge’ is described as such; in the Dvāpara they call the ‘Sacrifice’ the highest, and ‘Charity’ alone in the Kali-Cycle.”

In the same vein, the *Parāśara-smṛti* declares:

tapaḥ paraṁ kṛta-yuge tretāyāṁ jñānam-ucyate
dvāpare yajñam-evāhur-dānam-eva kalau-yuge

"In Satya-yuga austerity was considered the topmost process, cultivating knowledge is said (to be the same) in Tretā-yuga; in Dvāpara-yuga (they) say sacrifices (to be) the sole (rule); and charity alone in Kali-yuga" (Ps 1.23)

Now, commentators offer some rationale for the statements above, but the “problem” remains that the *Srimad-Bhagavatam*, the highest scriptural authority for both the Gaudiyas and for the whole yuga, says something different, for instance in a verse Srila Prabhupada quotes often:

kṛte yad dhyāyato viṣṇuṁ
tretāyāṁ yajato makhaiḥ
dvāpare paricaryāyāṁ
kalau tad dhari-kīrtanāt

"Whatever result was obtained in Satya-yuga by meditating on Viṣṇu, in Tretā-yuga by performing sacrifices, and in Dvāpara-yuga by serving the Lord's lotus feet can be obtained in Kali-yuga simply by chanting the Hare Kṛṣṇa *mahā-mantra.*" (SB 12.3.52)

With its stress on charity—instead than on chanting—the Manu-samhita clearly positions itself within the *karma-kāṇḍa* tradition, as already explained. Of course, charity remains a bona fide means of advancement and purification (especially when practiced as part of devotional service). The *Bhagavad-gita*, 18.5, declares that **"Acts of sacrifice, charity and penance are not to be given up; they must be performed. Indeed, sacrifice, charity and penance purify even the great souls,"** but by themselves cannot be compared to the power of the holy name, which possesses all the potencies of Krishna, and it's especially recommended as the only way to achieve spiritual success in this age. The *bhagavata* and puranic traditions' emphasis on the holy name clashes with the *dharma-sastras'* focus on something else. We find the same message of the *Bhagavatam* in the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* (6.2.17), in the *Padma Purāṇa* (*Uttara-khaṇḍa* 72.25), and in the *Bṛhan-nāradīya Purāṇa* (38.97), as explained in the purport of SB 12.3.52:

dhyāyan kṛte yajan yajñais
tretāyāṁ dvāpare 'rcayan
yad āpnoti tad āpnoti
kalau saṅkīrtya keśavam

"Whatever is achieved by meditation in Satya-yuga, by the performance of sacrifice in Tretā-yuga, and by the worship of Lord Kṛṣṇa's lotus feet in Dvāpara-yuga is obtained in the age of Kali simply by glorifying the name of Lord Keśava."

How much can Vaisnavas depend on or refer to *dharma-sastras* with so much incongruence even on fundamental notions? Readers are presumably already familiar with the oft-quoted statement from the *Bṛhan-nāradīya Purāṇa* (38.126):

harer nāma harer nāma
harer nāmaiva kevalam

kalau nāsty eva nāsty eva
nāsty eva gatir anyathā

In *Caitanya-caritamrita* (Adi-lila, 17.21-25), Lord Caitanya Mahaprabhu Himself cites and then explains this *śloka*: **"'In this Age of Kali there is no other means, no other means, no other means for self-realization than chanting the holy name, chanting the holy name, chanting the holy name of Lord Hari.' In this Age of Kali, the holy name of the Lord, the Hare Kṛṣṇa mahā-mantra, is the incarnation of Lord Kṛṣṇa. Simply by chanting the holy name, one associates with the Lord directly. Anyone who does this is certainly delivered. This verse repeats the word *'eva'* ['certainly'] three times for emphasis, and it also three times repeats *'harer nāma'* ['the holy name of the Lord'], just to make common people understand. The use of the word *'kevala'* ['only'] prohibits all other processes, such as the cultivation of knowledge, practice of mystic yoga, or performance of austerities and fruitive activities. This verse clearly states that anyone who accepts any other path cannot be delivered. This is the reason for the triple repetition 'nothing else, nothing else, nothing else,' which emphasizes the real process of self-realization."**

Lord Caitanya then continues His instructions on chanting, but the above excerpt is sufficient to highlight the exclusive prominence of the holy name—over and above all other methods. Mahaprabhu is the *yuga-avatara*, descended to reveal the ultimate path of enlightenment. He stressed the chanting of the holy name as the highest process and the *Bhagavatam* as the highest source of knowledge. Srila Prabhupada, Lord Caitanya's empowered emissary, unleashes a scathing, uncompromising purport to the verse CC Adi 17.24 above, which **"prohibits all other processes, such as … fruitive activities"** ("fruitive activities" being

synonymous with "*karma-kāṇḍa*"). Founder-*Acarya uvaca*: **"Our Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement stresses the chanting of the Hare Kṛṣṇa *mantra* only, whereas those who do not know the secret of success for this Age of Kali unnecessarily indulge in the cultivation of knowledge, the practice of mystic *yoga* or the performance of fruitive activities or useless austerities. They are simply wasting their time and misleading their followers. When we point this out very plainly to an audience, members of opposing groups become angry at us. But according to the injunctions of the *śāstras*, we cannot make compromises with these so-called *jñānīs, yogīs, karmīs* and *tapasvīs*. When they say they are as good as we are, we must say that only we are good and that they are not good. This is not our obstinacy; it is the injunction of the *śāstras*."**

Obviously, here Srila Prabhupada refers to "***śāstras***" in the highest connotation of the term; superlative *śāstras*, such as the *Srimad-Bhagavatam* and the *Caitanya-caritamrita*, because there are so many other minor texts also known as *śāstras* that promote lower, conditioned forms of *dharma*. One may ask, "But Lord Caitanya appeared more than a thousand years after the estimated date of compilation of the Manu-samhita; that's why there is no stress on the holy name as the path of virtue in Kali-yuga." But the *Bhagavatam* (and the other puranas) appeared some three-thousand years before the estimated date of compilation of the Manu-samhita; the inconsistency cannot thus be explained just as a matter of chronology. It seems that the difference depends on an incompatible set of priorities between the *bhakti-śāstras* and the *karma-kāṇḍa* texts. Another reason why devotees should remain vigilant, circumspect when dealing with the Manu-samhita (if they wish to deal with it at all).

But our "usual suspect" has something to say even on this subject: "The Criminal Code of our countries also does not promote yuga-dharma. Should we dismiss it on this ground?" My reply:

1. We can't even consider to "dismiss" the "Criminal Code of our counties" because it's not in our power to do so. The laws are operational and enforced

by various state agencies. We must follow those codes because otherwise we end up in prison; or worse.

2. Nobody expects the current criminal codes to define the "yuga-dharma." They are written for altogether other purposes (and not by Vedic sages) and so there is no surprise if those codes don't recommend chanting the holy names.
3. As the Manu-samhita is not operative or in effect anywhere in the world today, it's our intellectual and sampradayic duty to rigorously consider what's relevant and applicable in it and what's not. For instance, as we attempt in the next section, we need to compare the Manu-samhita's views on the role of women and the instructions of the Founder-*Acarya*.

What's Wrong with Manu-samhita? Part 14 – "We Want So Many Preachers, Both Men and Women"

The Manu-samhita verse that Srila Prabhupada quoted the most, deals with women protection:

pitā rakṣati kaumāre bhartā rakṣati yauvane
rakṣanti sthavire putrā na strī svātantryamarhati

"The father guards her during childhood, the husband guards her in youth, the sons guard her in old age; the woman is never fit for independence." (Ms 9.3)

Bhīṣmadeva speaks an almost identical verse in the Mahabharata (13.46.13):

pitā rakṣati kaumāre bhartā rakṣati yauvane
putrās tu sthavirī bhāve na strī svātantryam arhati

In this case there is nothing *wrong* about the verse, but the problem comes when we misunderstand its application. A famous quote attributed to Albert Einstein says, "Any fool can know. The point is to understand." Similarly, any fool (or any neo-smarta) can know and parrot ad infinitum the injunction that women should always be protected; but not everyone understands how to practically implement it. Notwithstanding consistently emphasizing the need for protection, Srila Prabhupada didn't try to restrict women only to the domestic sphere; he never intended for *protection* to take the form of "living under house arrest," where ladies are confined to their residence, in virtual detention, impeded from boldly interacting with the world (as some neo-smartas imagine and publicize). No, Srila Prabhupada

encouraged his lady followers to be active and assertive in their outreach activities. A few examples of his statements in this regard:

1. **"[T]he boys and girls in our Krsna Society should now give more attention for studying the books very attentively ... I hope in Washington center you will ask all the boys and girls to follow this method, because henceforward we will have to face many scholars and philosophers."** (Letter to Krishna Devi, 17 Feb 1970)

2. **"My Dear Daughters ... Regarding the problem of how to be aggressive on Samkirtan and submissive in the temple, my request to you is that you should go on being aggressive on Samkirtan ... If you are completely aggressive on Samkirtan, there should be no material aggressiveness and pride remaining."** (Letter to Jagaddhatri, Pasupati, Sailogata and Pamela, 30 July 1975)

3. **"So far as the woman distributors who have left New York and Boston Temples and have gone to New Vrindaban, they should return immediately and resume their original service. In Chaitanya Mahaprabhu's Movement, everyone is preacher, whether man or woman it doesn't matter ... Everyone should go out."** (Letter to Karandhara, 6 Oct 1973)

4. **"In India all the acharyas and their descendants later on acted only from the man's side. Their wives were at home because that is the system from old times that women are not required to go out. But in Bhagavad Gita we find that women are also equally competent like the men in the matter of Krishna Consciousness Movement. Please therefore carry on these missionary activities, and prove it by practical example that there is no bar for anyone in the matter of preaching work for Krishna Consciousness."** (Letter to Himavati, 20 Dec 1969)

Protecting women doesn't simply mean shielding them from physical harm. Real, realized protection must include protecting their enthusiasm, their chance to fully participate in Lord Caitanya's missionary adventures. Srila Prabhupada also provides a richer, more nuanced understanding of the "no independence" idea from the Manu-samhita:

"A woman is meant for being protected ... So according to Vedic system, there is no independent life of woman. *Na strī svātantryam arhati*. *Manu-saṁhitā*, that

strī—_strī_ means woman—'should not be allowed independence.' They should be given all protection. That's a very nice system. Not... independence does not mean their position is very lower. No. Just like children. Children has no independence. No independence means they are well protected. No independence does not mean that [s]he has no independence to act. No. She has got. But under the protection. Just like there are some nations still now, protectorate. America is protecting. America is a big nation and protecting another small nation. That does not mean they have no independence. They are also independent. They are acting like that. But because weaker, they should be given protection. Similarly, woman, children, _brāhmaṇa_, cow, old men, diseased men, they are to be protected. That is the social order." (Lecture on SB 2.1.2-5, Montreal, 23 Jan 1968)

The inclusion of women with the groups **"to be protected"**—such as *brāhmaṇas* and elders (categories to which, socially speaking, Srila Prabhupada belonged)—stresses the positive aspect of protection, of safeguarding someone precious but vulnerable. Srila Prabhupada's analogy of a *protectorate* deserves special attention. According to Wikipedia: "A protectorate, in the context of international relations, is a state that is under protection by another state for defence against aggression and other violations of law. It is a dependent territory that enjoys autonomy over most of its internal affairs, while still recognizing the suzerainty of a more powerful sovereign state without being a possession." The *protectorate* analogy encapsulates key aspects of the Vaisnava idea of man-woman relationship. For a culturally advanced civilization women protection constitutes a top priority. In advanced societies safeguarding their physical and moral welfare represents a fundamental principle. Being physically weaker, women are more susceptible to abuse, but mature Gaudiya-vaisnavism expertly harmonizes and reconciles women protection with their empowerment. As Srila Prabhupada clarifies above, **"No independence means they are well protected. No independence does not mean that [s]he has no independence to act. No. She has got."** Srila Prabhupada also explains that the recommendation of not remaining independent is offered in a fatherly (or grandfatherly) mood, with a caring and benign spirit: **"We give Kṛṣṇa consciousness both to the woman and man equally. We do not make any such**

distinction. But to protect them from this exploitation by man, we teach something that, 'You do like this. You do like that. You be married. Be settled up. Don't wander independently.' We teach them like that." (Conversation, Philadelphia, 13 July 1975) Male humans are dangerous. Be it due mostly to anatomical construction, to testosterone, or to cultural conditioning, statistics show that, across nearly all societies and time periods, men are more likely to engage in violent crimes (e.g., homicide, assault); to exhibit riskier, impulsive behaviors; to engage in warfare and organized conflict; and to display sexual predatorial instincts. Historically, with more access to weapons and authority, men generally had more means to inflict large-scale harm (a quick browsing of newspapers' headlines would vividly corroborate that). It's therefore imperative for more evolved, refined males to focus on protecting women from other, less developed males.

Fathers, Husbands, Sons… Of Course, But…

Due an incomplete exposure to Srila Prabhupada's wide range of instructions, some devotees lock their brain into partial sociological models. Those ideas may have their basis in wisdom but may not tell the whole story. Certain paradigms are fundamentally correct without being absolute. Just like the recommendation that every woman should marry. As much as possible the arrangements should be there, but no material provision can offer the deep sense of shelter that only true God consciousness can provide. (Also, due to karma or whatever not all women will get a husband, or a good one.) Speaking from the purely spiritual platform, Srila Prabhupada explains that ultimately only Krishna, and taking full shelter in Him, can offer real protection: **"If one becomes Kṛṣṇa conscious, then [s]he doesn't require husband; [s]he does not require … she knows that, 'Kṛṣṇa is my protector. Why shall I artificially seek after father or…?' And what protection, for a few days, either the father or the son or the husband may give? Real protection is Kṛṣṇa."** (Conversation, Bombay, 7 Jan 1977)

Besides this theologically potent viewpoint, the Manu-samhita itself points out that for a woman feeling protected is not just a matter of being externally safeguarded; it also depends on her own attitude and mindset:

arakṣitā gṛhe ruddhāḥ puruṣairāptakāribhiḥ
ātmānamātmanā yāstu rakṣeyustāḥ surakṣitāḥ

"Women confined in the house under trusted servants are not well guarded; really well guarded are those who guard themselves by themselves." (Ms 9.12)

A sense of safety and security can't be produced merely by physical provisions, by strong locks at the door or by muscular males watching over the household. Once I attended the seminar *Stri Dharma in the 21st Century and Beyond,* by Srimati Radha Dasi Prabhu, global Minister of the ISKCON Vaisnavi Ministry. I was edified and educated by hearing her saying that while she was in Mayapur, she was being protected by her husband, who was then in California, on the other side of the world. It's not just the physical proximity; it's the inner connection; the reciprocal commitment; the individuals' faithfulness to marriage vows; the mutual trust, support, benevolence, and affection—those ingredients engender the *feeling* of being protected.

As far as protecting elderly women; yes, if there are qualified sons (or disciples) to take care of them, that's best. But that's also not an absolute principle (especially as many women won't have grown-up, reliable sons…): **"Yes, after the husband retires from family life,"** Srila Prabhupada writes, **"the wife can live alone in a sacred place of pilgrimage, like Vrindaban, provided she has got sufficient strength. There is no female sannyas. If the children are favorable, it is better to remain with children. Or, she can live alone after 50 years old, if she is able."** (Letter to Malati, 20 July 1968)

Protection Doesn't Preclude Empowerment

Srila Prabhupada, an outspoken promoter of women protection, was also unambiguous in his desire to see ladies empowered to share Krishna's message, also from the *vyasasana*, the ceremonial seat for teachers of sastra: **"Regarding lecturing by woman devotees: I have informed you that in the service of the Lord there is no distinction of caste or creed, color, or sex … We require a person who is in the knowledge of Krishna, that is the only qualification of a person speaking … we want so many preachers, both men and women."** (Letter to Jayagovinda, 8 Feb 1968) Srila Prabhupada's followers should follow him, not some archaic or constipated conceptions of *protection*. Only insecure, damaged men fear seeing

Narayani Mataji, first ISKCON Vaisnavi diksa-guru

women becoming impactful teachers and preachers. Such men may hide behind the Manu-samhita to conceal their inadequate masculinity, to justify their infantile machismo, but loyal and confident men will try their best to fulfill Srila Prabhupada's and Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura's desire: **"His Divine Grace Oṁ Viṣṇupāda Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Gosvāmī Prabhupāda, my (Prabhupāda's voice chokes up) beloved spiritual master. He is seeing. He had a great desire to preach Lord Caitanya's message in the Western world. And I am sure he will be pleased to see so many young boys and girls are seriously engaged in preaching the gospel of Lord Caitanya Mahāprabhu."** (Initiation lecture, Montreal, 11 Aug 1968) In Krishna consciousness we should eagerly facilitate all men and all women to reach their full potential as lovers of God and fruitful instruments in God's mission. Failing to do so represents a great disservice to individuals, to the *sampradaya*, and to humanity at large.

What's Wrong with Manu-samhita? Part 15 – "Conclusion (for Now)"

Let's briefly recap some of the issues with the Manu-samhita, issues that should deter ISKCON devotees from unquestionably embracing its text:

1. In one sense, we don't even know what the real "Manu-samhita" was. Is there any evidence that the original by any of the Manus, or any authorized summary, survived intact? Scholars date the present version to a couple of thousand years. How much of the text really came from Manu and how much must be credited to an unknown *brahmana* or committee "channeling" or impersonating Manu?

2. The corruption of the text, according to Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakura, modifies its fundamental sociological DNA, substituting the pristine *daiva-varnasrama* conception with the *asura-varnasrama* model, rigidly based on birth and hereditary privilege.

3. Although Srila Prabhupada did quote some verses of the Manu-samhita and accepted it as *sastra*, he also made several statements relativizing (if not delegitimizing) its importance for Vaisnavas.

4. Srila Prabhupada also said that, from the *bhagavata* perspective, religious systems up to the idea of liberation are cheating. He even said that **"Manu-saṁhitā is not religion,"** but only **"moral principles for conducting society."** (Morning Walk, Hyderabad, 20 April 1974) Therefore useful—in the proper context—but limited in scope and applicability.

5. By classifying the Manu-samhita as a *karma-kanda* text (SB 6.1.7, purport), Srila Prabhupada, placed it on level lower than the essential *bhagavata* sastras. Quoting Srila Narottama Das Thakura, Srila Prabhupada even wrote: **"a real Vaiṣṇava takes these sections** [*karma-kanda* and *jnana-kanda*] **as a poison pot."** (CC Madhya, 5.24, purport). The expression is heavy, but, for our own good, we should seriously listen to the acaryas.

6. Some of the ethical teachings in Manu-samhita are present in all human societies as universal parameters of civilization. For instance: the idea that fathers should protect their daughters, that husbands should protect their wives, or that grown-up sons should protect their widowed mothers aren't exclusive Vedic or Hindu ideas. Any decent human being in any traditional culture imbibes those duties. Other injunctions also represent common-sense directions. For instance, any sane mother, at any latitude, should instruct her children to "not run when it is raining" (Ms 4.38) as the ground is slippery and they may fall and hurt themselves.

7. While Srila Prabhupada did mention that according to the Manu-samhita widows shouldn't remarry, he also explained that the idea is that ladies who lost their husbands should voluntarily embrace a life of detachment and exclusive focus on Krishna, the eternal husband. Srila Prabhupada also mentioned cases in which widow remarriage is approved (if not recommended). This theme underlines of the necessity of studying the full corpus of Srila Prabhupada's teachings, and not getting locked on isolated statements, artificially taking them as universal and all-encompassing.

8. The present version contains lists of punishments that seem so unjust as to appear repugnant, such as the injunction to cut the tongue of a *sudra* who insults a *brahmana*. Are we meant to approve of such penalties? Besides, in the present conflictive climate of ISKCON, if we consider most devotees as *sudras* by birth (according to the canons of this Manu-samhita), how many of them would lose their tongues? How would they then manage to chant their rounds or sing in *harinama*? Besides the internal application in ISKCON, are we meant to advocate such measures to the judiciaries of the world as our suggestions for improving human society? If not, how can we promote the (whole) book as a valuable addition to the legal system? Supporting—directly or indirectly—the kind of verdicts and sentencings described in the text can easily cause ISKCON to be branded in the same category of ISIS or the Taliban—or worse.

9. Another important text in the *dharma-sastra* tradition, the *Parasara-smriti*, says that Manu-samhita was meant for Satya-yuga, not for Kali-yuga. If we take that seriously, how would that affect our enthusiasm for the Manu-samhita?

10. The text contains numerous contradictions and inconsistencies due to juxtaposition, anthologizing, hyperbolizing, etc. which makes it difficult to always identify clear conclusions. To arrive at practical, implementable directions would presumably take long-winded debates and lengthy diatribes (and for what? For a text that doesn't have any legal authority anywhere in the world?).

11. The final section of the last chapter of Manu-samhita, most likely a later addition, concludes the book with a strong tinge of advaitic, impersonal philosophy: "The self alone is all the gods … he who thus perceives the self through the self, in all beings, becomes equal towards all and attains the highest state, Brahman." (Ms 119 & 125) It's kind of ironic that after a protracted symphony on caste-consciousness, the book should end recommending the reader to become "equal towards all"… A famous commentator, Medhatithi, belongs to the godless, atheistic school of Karma-mimamsa; he proposes dismantling the theistic framework of the Manu-samhita as irrelevant and superstitious. So, getting involved with the Manu-

samhita almost necessarily involves connecting with some unsavory ideas and characters.

12. The Catch-22 effect. Ironically, according to the text, the near totality of those interested in the Manu-samhita can't even touch the book. They are banned—by the book itself—from studying it. A freeze, a paradox of epic proportions: believing in the infallibility of the text prohibits the believer from reading it. What a tragicomic twist!

13. The Manu-samhita doesn't recognize or promote the *yuga-dharma* for this age, the chanting of the holy names. What to say about a *sastra* that doesn't include the most fundamental "escape route" for Kali-yuga residents?

14. When specifically asked about utilizing some impregnation ritual from the Manu-samhita, Srila Prabhupada clearly disapproved: **"I discussed the contents of your letter with His Divine Grace ... Prabhupada said: 'We do not want all these rituals. Chanting Hare Krishna is our only business. According to the *Manu-samhita* you are all *mlecchas* and *yavanas*. You cannot touch the *Manu-samhita*, what to speak of translating it. So if you try to follow the *Manu-samhita* then you become a *mleccha* and *yavana* and your career is finished.'"** (Letter to Madhusudana, by Tamal Krishna Gosvami, Secretary to Srila Prabhupada, 19 May 1977)

15. I purposefully avoided dwelling on most of the injunctions related to women. Perhaps due to laziness, I sidestepped most gender-related aspects in the Manu-samhita. Even perfectly valid instructions—such as the need to protect women in all phases of their life—can be easily misinterpreted and misapplied by men lacking wisdom or psychological wellbeing.

The above issues make it imperative for us to be cautious and even suspicious about the Manu-samhita, what to speak of publicly endorsing it. Simplistically and dogmatically, some devotees are content with just recognizing (and loudly declaring) that Srila Prabhupada accepted the Manu-samhita as **"the standard lawbook for humanity."** (SB 2.1.36, purport) We acknowledge their innocence and implicit faith; but those representing ISKCON in serious discussions, considering all other "balancing" statements by the Founder-*Acarya* need to relinquish the naïve, jingoistic mindset of indiscriminate cheerleading.

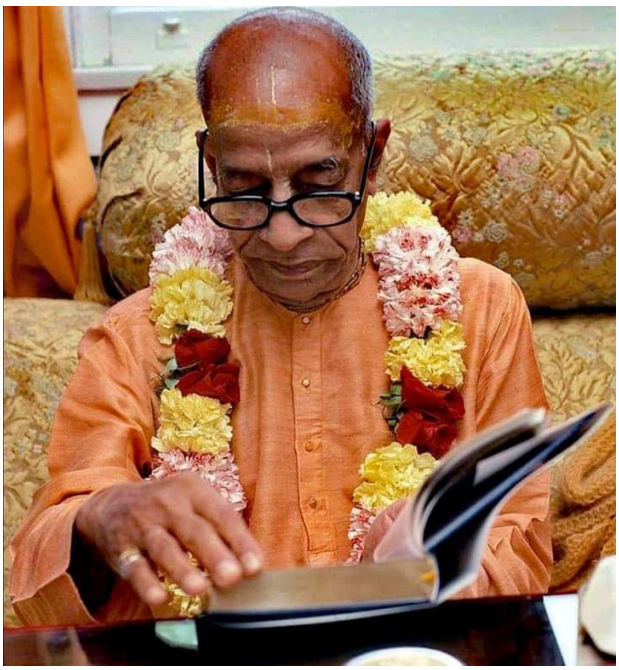
During the Facebook exchanges, I noticed that the devotees vocally favoring the adoption of the Manu-samhita shy away from addressing some of the issues I listed. They may keep arguing (and I have only reported a fraction of the objections I received) but so far I have not heard any substantial confutation of the problems I reported—besides expressions of this or that logical fallacy. The following, for instance, represents a stupendous example of *straw man*, of attacking an idea that was never presented. Our *Facebook Argumentator-in-Chief* wrote: "Your appeal to imitate pure devotees who are above the rules and regulations generally presented in Manu-samhita is wrong." But I never ever said, wrote, or thought anything like that. The Gaudiya-vaisnava scriptures and particularly Srila Prabhupada books provide plenty of "rules and regulations." Relativizing the relevance of the Manu-samhita doesn't mean playing down those "rules and regulations."

Look, I live my life—gladly unconstrained by the psychological need to accept in toto the available editions of the Manu-samhita—and you live yours. You can choose to involve yourself with the text, but you do it at your own risk. Unless you are a Vaisnava scholar whose devotional service is to explore and explain the book, or a professional Indologist paid to investigate old Indian texts, I doubt you need to involve yourself very much with it—other than by connecting with what the *acaryas* have quoted from it. My primary motivation in writing this book was not to absolutely reject or disparage the Manu-samhita and other *dharma-sastras*, but to counteract the ongoing neo-smarta, apa-sampradayic activism that eclipses and relativizes the primary texts of Gaudiya-vaisnavism by promoting lesser (and often misleading) sources. Such poisonous propaganda profoundly corrupts the spirit of the *sampradaya.*

I also occasionally quote the Manu-samhita in speeches and seminars, presenting certain passages as valid references. That is, when I deem the verses compatible with Gaudiya-vaisnavism, not corrupted by casteism, impersonalism, or other undesirable attitudes. Srila Prabhupada, for instance, cited this Manu-samhita verse more than once: ***"Pravṛttir eṣāṁ bhūtānāṁ nivṛttes tu mahā-phalam.*** **We are inclined to enjoy this material world, but if we stop this material enjoyment, we are fit for spiritual enjoyment."** (Ms 5.56, in a lecture on SB 6.1.2, Honolulu, 6 May 1976) So, we can certainly extract useful concepts from this thorny, problematic, and somewhat embarrassing text, but why not rather focus on the fundamental texts for Gaudiya-vaisnavas, reservoirs of unparalleled theology and superlative guidance;

texts overflowing with blissful and bhakti-nourishing narrations. In fact, that's what the Founder-*Acarya* recommends in *Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta* (Madhya 22.118, purport):

"One should not partially study a book just to pose oneself as a great scholar by being able to refer to scriptures. In our Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement we have therefore limited our study of Vedic literatures to *Bhagavad-gītā*, *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, *Caitanya-caritāmṛta* and *Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu*. These four works are sufficient for preaching purposes. They are adequate for the understanding of the philosophy and the spreading of missionary activities all over the world."



Jaya Śrīla Prabhupāda.

Oṁ Tat Sat

Appendix One - The Lawbooks for the Next 10,000 Years?

As the Manu-samhita is primarily a legal text, and as Srila Prabhupada said that his books would serve as lawbooks, I though it appropriate to include this section, also originally published as a Facebook post, now edited and expanded.

I have four considerations I want to share with you on this.

1.
Although the sentence "my books will be the lawbooks for the next 10,000 years" was never recorded, I believe Srila Prabhupada said it, in some form. There is too much anecdotical evidence—several devotees claim they heard Srila Prabhupada saying it (although in different versions)—to dismiss it as a fabrication. So, let's assume that he did say it (in some form or another).

2.
Although I believe he said it, let's consider that it belongs to a particular category of statements that Srila Prabhupada didn't attempt to make public. He neither spoke it during recorded lectures, nor within recorded conversations, nor in recorded interviews, and he never wrote it in his books or letters. It doesn't seem Srila Prabhupada made any special effort to give resonance and officiality to the statement, although he could have easily emphasized it, if he had wanted. If he intended this statement to be a fundamental principle for ISKCON, why he never openly and publicly injected it in formal expressions, thud enshrining it as a recorded legacy? If Srila Prabhupada himself didn't formally stress it, how much should his followers emphasize it and keep repeating it at every opportunity, using it almost as a "cognitive stability mantra"? It seems that the slogan "my books will be the lawbooks for the next 10,000 years" has assumed the function of a placebo against ISKCON's present irrelevance on the world stage.

3.
Let's recognize that, technically and plainly speaking, Srila Prabhupada books, although containing references to law and legislative principles, are not "lawbooks"

in the dictionary meaning of the word: "a book containing or dealing with laws, legal subjects, or cases adjudicated." (Merriam-Webster) They certainly don't contain specific directives on the vast variety of crimes and corresponding penalties. Srila Prabhupada books could become *the basis* of future lawbooks but in their present form they can't be used by courts for, say, sentencing someone to incarceration. Of course, Srila Prabhupada describes divine laws and the broad consequences of not following them, but not in the form of detailed, implementable legal codes, enforceable by humans on other humans. To turn Srila Prabhupada's books into lawbooks for usage by the courts would take an enormous work of analysis, exegesis, and clarification.

4.
By saying "my books" or "these books" (will be the lawbooks for 10,000 years) did Srila Prabhupada mean his purports or the original texts, the *sastra* he commented upon? In other words, did he mean that his published BBT books could/should/would become the lawbooks, or that the original scriptures, such as *Bhagavad-gita* and *Srimad-Bhagavatam*, should become the basis for future jurisprudence? This is a crucial, fundamental question.

Prostitution; Should It Be Criminalized or Legalized?

A major issue: in some cases, it may not be immediately clear what Srila Prabhupada is actually recommending. For instance, Srila Prabhupada wrote in his purport to SB 1.17.38: **"[T]he state should categorically stop all sorts of gambling, drinking, prostitution and falsity ... Intoxication of all description—even smoking cigarettes, chewing tobacco or the drinking of tea—must be prohibited."**

For now, let's just focus on prostitution (engaging in sexual activity in exchange for payment), which, according to this purport, "the state should categorically stop." We can grasp the underlining principles involved, such as curbing illicit sexual activities, protecting morality, and preventing exploitation; but just six chapters before Srila Prabhupada had written (SB 1.11.19, purport): **"[P]rostitutes are necessary citizens for the proper upkeep of society ... if there is no prostitute, then such low men will induce others into prostitution. It is better that prostitutes be available in the marketplace so that the sanctity of society can be**

maintained. It is better to maintain a class of prostitutes than to encourage prostitutes within society."

So, what is it? Should society cautiously but harmoniously integrate prostitution (as per SB 1.11.19p) or criminalize it (as per SB 1.17.38p)? Was Srila Prabhupada using the word "prostitution" in different ways, with different meanings, in the two purports? If prostitution should be made illegal, who should be punished for its practice? The prostitutes themselves, their clients, or both? (The legal systems of different countries have answered these questions in different ways.) And what about those aiding and abetting prostitution? If there should be penalties, what forms should they take—fines, imprisonment, or some other punishment? How severe should the penalties be? If there should be fines, what should be their minimum and maximum? If there should be imprisonment, what should be the minimum and maximum terms? We can easily see that a broad concept such as legally disallowing prostitution involves dozens of subsequent considerations and clarifications.

If, instead, we take the other route and conclude that **"It is better that prostitutes be available in the marketplace"** (as per SB 1.11.19p), what standards should regulate the profession? Where could it be practiced? Who can be legitimately introduced to it and how? What would the minimum age be, for the sex workers and for the solicitors? Should government agencies establish the prices of each service? Should income from prostitution be taxed, and, if yes, in what proportions? In fact, different countries, even on the same continent, approach the matter in different ways. We could go on listing bigger and smaller legal questions; from "What exactly constitutes prostitution?" to "Can clients get tax exemption?" All such questions would need answers before Srila Prabhupada books could be used in courts; and, of course, at that point the books wouldn't look

the same anymore; they would be completely different texts with only a remote resemblance to the original.[25]

It Would Take Immense Efforts, Likely Lasting Centuries

A huge work would be required to repurpose and retrofit the BBT editions for use by the judicial system. First, scholars and other specialists would have to agree on fundamental questions, such as "Should prostitution be legalized or not?" (And multiply that for the multitudes of activities that need regulation in human society). The effort would then include—for every single law and amendment—formal proposals to legislative assemblies and other lawmaking bodies, then parliamentary debates and voting. I am not saying that the colossally complex, politically-charged project of turning Srila Prabhupada's statements into laws should not be undertaken; I am just saying that before his books could be used as lawbooks in the courts an enormous amount of processing—exegetical, intellectual, cultural, political, and legislative—would need to take place. Without such processing the meme "lawbooks for 10,000 years" would remain a cherished but impractical fantasy. Besides, there are many important fields of law, the majority of which are hardly covered or explicitly illuminated by Srila Prabhupada's books.[26]

Another possible explanation for the "lawbooks for the next 10,000 years" phrase is that Srila Prabhupada, in one or more instances, may have intended it to apply specifically or especially to ISKCON. That appears as a plausible possibility, as the literary work of the Founder-*Acarya* can be legitimately expected to remain as a fundamental reference, like a lawbook, for the members of the Society for which he is and will remain the Founder-*Acarya*. In any case, whatever the intent or intents might have been behind the utterance, we can certainly agree that both our

[25] Most ISKCON devotees may be largely uninterested in the phenomenon of prostitution (without considering the amount of pornography furtively consumed—which, based on anecdotical evidence, appears not insignificant), but as a socio-economical, cultural, ethical, legal, and philosophical subject it certainly demands the attention of lawmakers and other individuals concerned with the wellbeing of society. Consider that according to a study there are approximately 42 million prostitutes in the world, for an annual revenue estimated to be over 100 billion US dollars. Most prostitutes are female and between the ages of 13 and 25. India, with roughly 3 million prostitutes, is widely regarded as having one of the world's largest commercial sex industries and has emerged as a international hub of sex tourism.

[26] Brown University, for example, lists 17 major fields of law: https://prelaw.brown.edu/degrees-careers/fields-law - on that page we find this statement: "The legal publishers created a taxonomy of the law for purposes of indexing cases for legal research – that taxonomy includes more than 100 fields of law."

movement and the legal systems of the world would tremendously benefit from being molded by the ideals and instructions present in Srila Prabhupada's books.

What Books Are We Talking About?

Let's focus on this question: when Srila Prabhupada said, "my books," or "these books" (will be the lawbooks for 10,000 years), was he indicating the BBT editions we are familiar with, which include his purports, or the original texts, such as the *Gita* and the *Bhagavatam*? I lean toward the second hypothesis; that he meant that the *sastra* should become the foundation of human lawmaking.

First, Srila Prabhupada knew very well how a lawbook looks like; and he knew that his purports were not written in such a format, but as philosophical, theological, sociological, and missiological commentaries. It seems highly implausible that Srila Prabhupada would expect his purports to serve—in their present form—as legal codes and state laws to be enforced by tribunals and courtrooms. His direct statements could become the basis for some important laws, of course, but not for most of them.

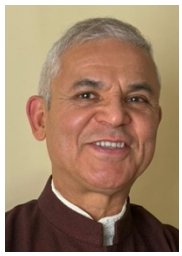
Second, several times he equated "sastra" with lawbooks. For instance: "*Śāstra* and law book is the same." (Lecture on SB 6.1.8-13, New York, 24 July 1971) "*Śāstra* is the regulative principles, the book of law." (Lecture on Bg 7.11-12, Bombay, 25 Feb 11974) "Lord Chaitanya conducted His transcendental movement strictly according to the injunction of the Shastras (law-books)." (Back to Godhead, Vol 1, Part 1, 1944) My tentative conclusion is that what Srila Prabhupada meant by the "10,000 years" statement is something along the lines of: "In the future, the Vaisnava *sastras*, including my books, should/shall become the basis for human legislation." Kanka Devi Dasi (ACBSP) offers a corroboration for this view by telling how Srila Prabhupada, during a press conference in Berkeley in connection with the 1975 Ratha-yatra, at one point held up the *Bhagavatam* and said boldly, "This *Srimad Bhagavatam* will be the lawbook for mankind for the next 10,000 years." Kanka Devi swears by this as she heard it with her own ears.

Summarizing:

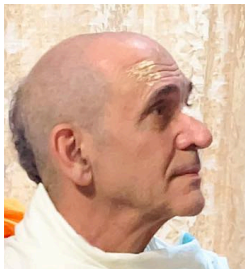
1. I believe that Srila Prabhupada did say, in some form, that "His/these books will be the lawbooks for the next 10,000 years."
2. Srila Prabhupada did not ensure that this statement be recorded in written or audio formats; so, why should it become a fundamental tenet for ISKCON?

3. His books, in their present forms, are not lawbooks usable in the courts, and they do not explicitly cover many important fields of law. It would require a monumental amount of work to "translate" them into legal codes.
4. Plausibly, Srila Prabhupada may have primarily meant that scriptures such as the *Srimad-Bhagavatam* would/should/shall gradually become the basis for important human legislation.

In any case, we should remain aware that the "lawbooks for 10,000 years" alleged statement raises enormous intellectual and practical issues to be patiently and expertly addressed. Superficial sloganizing doesn't do justice to the subject.



Lilananda Prabhu (ACBSP) asked on Facebook: "Do we know who first came up with this statement 'Law-books for 10,000 years'?" I don't exactly know the chronology, but several devotees reported hearing it. Below I am quoting from a research project that collected their statements:



Srutakirti Prabhu reported, "I did hear him say it ... [Srila Prabhupada] would say how we didn't speak 'perhaps/maybe' but we spoke from Sastra. He said, 'just like the lawyer refers to the law books. We do the same. These are our law books. We don't speak nonsense we speak from our law books. *These are the law books for the next ten thousand years.'* There are many *darshans* that were recorded but many were not. It was before cassettes were in use and everything was done on the reel-to-reel Grundig. Tapes were not easily available during that time. He said it and he meant it."

Another reference from that research: "Ramesvara prabhu reports hearing Srila Prabhupada say: *'My books will stand as the law books for humankind for the next 10,000 years'* when he was at Kumbha Mela with Srila Prabhupada."

Kanka Devi Dasi Prabhu's reminiscence from a press conference was already cited in the post. "She says it [the statement, 'This *Srimad-Bhagavatam* will be the lawbook for mankind for the next 10,000 years'] was the discussion topic of all the devotees in attendance after Srila Prabhupada's meeting with the press was over."

Another testimonial from the same research: "Harikesa told me personally that once in the early hours of the morning he was cleaning up the ante room outside Srila Prabhupada's darshan room. Srila Prabhupada was working inside on his translation work. Harikesa prabhu was making noise and Srila Prabhupada called him in. Srila Prabhupada said 'Please try to do that quietly. I have to concentrate and pick each word very carefully because these books will stand as the lawbooks for the next ten thousand years.'"

Finally, the Srila Prabhupada Lilamrita, Chapter 50, reports that in Los Angeles, in 1976, "One day in the car he had said, 'My books will be the lawbooks for human society for the next ten thousand years.'"

Damodara Dasa wrote: "Surely the reference to 'law books' is metaphorical. Srila Prabhupada was not discussing law - except in some extremely rare cases. But just like lawyers arguing a case might refer to previous cases, so devotees arguing over *siddhanta* naturally look to cite references in Srila Prabhupada's books to support their assertions. Was Prabhupada being literal about 10,000 years - or is this merely a literary device meaning 'for a long time into the future'?"

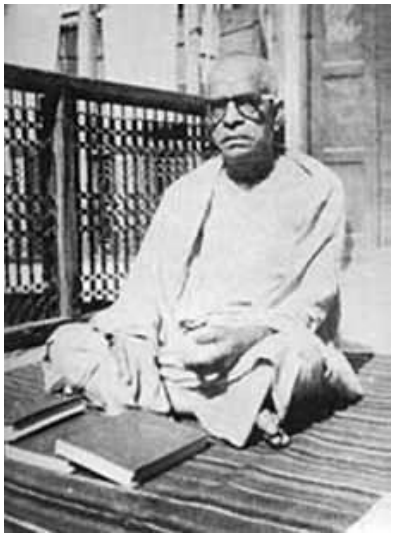
In another Facebook comment Maha Benitez wrote: "Clearly Srila Prabhupada's statements and comments are relevant in terms of orienting us towards the supreme goal of life; in other fields, such as science, politics and laws, each passing day we realize that they are somewhat anachronical, if we read the story of Prithu Maharaja for example, we will see that his kind of world government, based on a holy monarchy, it is absolutely antagonistic to the social political movement of the prevailing democracies in the world. I feel that we should take Prabhupada as an impeccable and honest spiritual teacher and, following his spiritual logic, arm ourselves with a mature mindset to move in this world with coherence and expertise … even Prabhupada … humbly acknowledged possible errors, imperfections, in his writings."

This requires a bit of explanation and unpacking. The *Bhagavatam*—and therefore Srila Prabhupada's purports—may describe political realities that don't exist

anymore; but his commentaries remain fully relevant, even if the circumstances described in sastra are not present today, because he is presenting universal principles of good government. Those parameters are independent from any specific model (monarchy, democracy, dictatorship, etc.). In fact, Srila Prabhupada multiple times uses the expression: **"The king or the executive head."** (Bg 3.21p, KB 89, SB 1.17.4p, SB 4.21.49p, etc.) In other words, the parameters of good leadership and enlightened governance transcend historical circumstances and specific political structures, not only in a monarchy. And, this should be clear, Srila Prabhupada was under no illusion that a global monarchical government would manifest soon (or ever, in Kali-yuga). He writes, **"monarchy is abolished by the laws of nature in every country."** (SB 4.26.6, purport), but the need for good political leadership remains: **"president, king or the executive head must be a saintly person."** (Lecture on SB 1.16.36, Tokyo, 30 Jan 1974) For instance, the *Bhagavatam* describes the leadership qualities of Maharaja Prithu, and contemporary political leaders could and should endeavor to develop and display them, for example his following dharma, protecting dharma, and engaging everyone in dharma (SB 4.16.4); his extracting taxes and returning them **"in times of need."** (SB 4.16.5); his being **"very, very kind to all citizens"** (SB 4.16.6); his remaining fair, impartial, free from favoritism and nepotism (4.16.13); his being "**a lover of the brahminical culture"** (SB 4.16.16); I could go on, but you get the idea. The training of future leaders, the laws of the country, and the exercise of the executive power should align with those virtues.

Maharaja Prithu listening to the four Kumaras

As far as the idea that Srila Prabhupada "humbly acknowledged possible errors, imperfections, in his writings," well, he self-effacingly expressed the challenges he was facing in conveying the message of the *Bhagatavam* to the English-speaking world, but that was about *language*, not about *content* or *relevance*. He wrote: **"Our presenting this matter in adequate language, especially a foreign language, will**



certainly fail, and there will be so many literary discrepancies despite our honest attempt to present it in the proper way." (SB 1.5.11, purport) We shouldn't think that he had any doubt about the validity of the knowledge he was transmitting. In the same purport he also wrote: **"After all, it is a technical science of spiritual values, and thus we are concerned with the techniques and not with the language. If the techniques of this great literature are understood by the people of the world, there will be success."** Those **"techniques"** and **"spiritual values"** include the principles for properly running a state. Regardless of the shape of the administrative structure, such directions remain universally relevant and sorely needed.

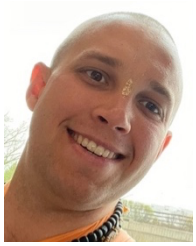
Therefore, we truly hope and pray for the day Srila Prabhupada's books will become "the lawbooks for 10,000 years," but that aspiration, that ambition shouldn't take the form of neophytes' daydreaming or of bigots' quirk. Otherwise we will look like fools.

The Dangers of Overemphasizing the "Lawbooks for 10,000 Years" Statement

1. Devotees may look like uneducated simpletons who can't distinguish between formal legal texts and commentaries on the scriptures.
2. Devotees may look as blissfully unaware (ignorant) that there are many fields of law and that Srila Prabhupada's books hardly touch on a number of them.
3. Devotees may sound as fanatical fundamentalists who wish to abruptly establish a theocracy by suddenly, artificially substituting the existing laws of the state with the books of their guru.
4. Devotees may dreamily hope that one day, perhaps all of a sudden, Srila Prabhupada's books will be simply accepted by legislators and adopted, in their present form, as the law of their countries.
5. Devotees may show themselves unaware of the huge effort that would take to turn the Srila Prabhupada books into applicable legal codes.
6. Devotees may indiscriminately quote, with disastrous results, passages of Srila Prabhupada books only meant for and relevant to specific times, places, and

circumstances as applying always, everywhere, and to everyone—because of assuming that everything in the books is "for the next 10,000 years." Thus, internal ISKCON exegesis may debase to rudimentary, primitive matches of "quotes' slinging"—a tradition already well-established.

7. Devotees may take the narrations of customs and practices from previous ages that Srila Prabhupada inserted in his books as meant to be applied today and in the future. In other words, they may mistake *descriptions* for *prescriptions*.
8. Devotees may misunderstand occasional references to this or that *sastra* as endorsements of the complete contents of those texts, thus creating hierarchical confusion about what sources are more important for Gaudiya-vaisnavism.



On Facebook, I encouraged readers to comment by saying; "Any other risks you can think of? Any objection to this list?" Uttamasloka Das Brahmachari offered an elaborate reply: "4 and 5 seems to be more broadly applicable statements. I meet a lot of devotees who seem to think the books will automatically do whatever, as if the books have agency over themselves to jump out of boxes and change the world, with no input from the devotees. Recently I was expressing to one devotee the idea that 'these books tell us directly that they are meant to be revolutionary in nature, changing lives and the world, but they cannot do that if we don't give them to people and try to convince them to read.' To which I was met with a rather glib 'Well, they're already out there so what more do we have to do?" OK, sure, some books are out there. A few tens of thousands. But in a world constantly expanding into the billions in terms of population, a few hundred thousand, a few million books just sitting in wait isn't enough. *Sankirtan* movement means exactly that, movement, but if we aren't moving, then what are we doing? As someone concerned with book distribution, I do tend to view things thru that lens expressly. But I do also appreciate the above in the context presented as well. I think all too many people don't apply their brain power or critical thinking, resulting in a dumbing down of the statements of not just Srila Prabhupada, but other *acharyas* as well. For every person that takes the 'lawbooks' statement literally, I meet another who takes as a metaphor Thakura Bhaktivinoda's statement on longing to seeing a high court judge wearing tilak. To speak very broadly, I think most people lack real nuance in their thinking … For those of us who see and acknowledge the immense complexity and nuance of the words of the *acharyas*, it can be quite painful to hear such a simplified understanding as 'he literally wants

his books used in the courtroom.' Fortunately though, you, dear Kaunteya Prabhu, have kindly taken to trying to elaborate to such people an idea beyond the literal. And for that, we're all grateful."

I hesitated to include this last point, but then I thought that Uttamasloka Das Brahmachari clearly recognized the intent behind the posts—and therefore behind this book; that is, "trying to elaborate … an idea beyond the literal."

Appendix Two - Hridayananda Maharaja on "the Lawbooks for the Next 10,000 Years"

Hridayananda Maharaja wrote on this topic on an email thread of a large leadership discussion group. The tension: some devotees (including very senior ones) appeared happy to conclude that the statement "lawbooks for 10,000 years," was genuine, that Srila Prabhupada spoke it, and that it should be taken literally, at face value (whatever that means). Basically, they were saying that Srila Prabhupada's books should be taken as the lawbooks and that's it. End of story. But Hridayananda Maharaja explained that the matter is far more complex. I fully agree with him, and in fact he gets the credit for most of the ideas present in Appendix One. Here I am excerpting some of the highlights from those emails. I enclose this section also to show that sometimes dogmatic and crudely literalistic approaches can affect any level of our Society.

[Hridayananda Maharaja wrote to a member of the email discussion group:]

Thank you for the file with quotes[27] which merely begins our discussion of lawbooks, it does not end it. Here are some points:

1. Srutikirti explains that in the early days, some darshanas were not recorded on the Grundig recorder. Prabhupada himself was no less aware of this fact. My repeated experience is that Prabhupada was extremely aware of when he was not being recorded, and when he was.
2. If Prabhupada intended the 'lawbook' comment to be a fundamental principle in ISKCON, it is somewhat mysterious that he never said it in any of his many thousands of purports. He never said it in his thousands of classes,

[27] The file included the recollections of various devotees remembering Srila Prabhupada speaking some version of the "lawbooks for 10,000 years" statement; I extensively quoted from that document in Appendix One.

nor in his thousands of darshanas, walk conversations, nor in any other situation that was being recorded. If the lawbook idea was so important, why didn't Prabhupada include it in one of the countless thousands of situations where he knew perfectly well that he was being recorded? Do we have other examples of basic principles of ISKCON that Prabhupada consciously never mentioned in any forum that was being recorded?

3. Obviously, Prabhupada's statements provide a basis for some important laws, but not for most laws … And of course, there are dozens of minor fields of law, at the local, state/provincial, and national level. Therefore the claim that Prabhupada's books will be THE lawbooks clearly requires a good deal of explaining.
4. Even if we compare Prabhupada's teachings to the Manu-samhita, which Prabhupada publicly and repeatedly described as a lawbook, the MS format is very different. It has the normal format of a lawbook. Prabhupada's books certainly serve as the basis for many laws, but they are not published in the recognizable, normal form of a lawbook. The laws would have to be derived and organized into a lawbook format …
5. The process of extracting from Prabhupada's books clear laws, and then organizing those statements into a normal, recognizable lawbook, would be elaborate indeed. Fifty years after Prabhupada demanded it, the GBC cannot complete a constitution for ISKCON.[28] How many centuries will it take to transform Prabhupada's teachings on so many ISKCON and non-ISKCON topics into a coherent lawbook? And this process will surely require large amounts of interpretation, contextualization etc. …

Prabhupada himself stated in a morning walk conversation that I attended that often one must first eliminate what is not true, before proceeding to what is true. Thus, it is incorrect to say that we must either discuss ways that Prabhupada's books are not lawbooks, OR ways in which they are lawbooks. Both topics are essential. Obviously. I will begin a discussion of how Prabhupada's books ARE lawbooks with the following:

1. Prabhupada elaborately describes the divine *varṇāśrama-dharma*, which is the essential structure of human civilization.
2. Prabhupada describes the evils of abortion, animal slaughter, unnecessary warfare, gambling, etc. Prabhupada's teachings on these moral topics are the foundation for many laws.

[28] On 16th April 2025, the ISKCON's Governing Body Commission (GBC) ratified the *ISKCON Constitution*.

3. Of course, precise jurisprudential details, legal technicalities, of which there are thousands, would often have to be derived, not merely copied, from Prabhupada's books. Many laws would have to be derived from Bhagavata theology. Law and theology are related but different modes of expression.
4. Prabhupada's teachings on the duty of government leaders to promote God consciousness would clearly lead to laws. In this case too, there would be thousands of legal details to work out, and much negotiation with leaders of other religions. Again, there would be an inevitable process leading from Prabhupada's literal statements to practical application in many different countries with distinct legal traditions, social, cultural, and religious customs, assumptions etc.

[Citing the list of quotes corroborating the fact that Srila Prabhupada "lawbooks for the next 10,000 years" statement was true, someone argued:]

"The validity and meaning of the historical references I posted are abundantly clear to those who are neutral. Srila Prabhupada affirmed the point that *'My books will stand as the lawbooks for humankind for the next 10,000 years'* repeatedly—in Los Angeles, San Francisco, Bhaktivedanta Manor, Kumbha Mela, and Vrindaban."

[Hridayananda Maharaja replied:] In fact, it is not 'abundantly clear' what the words 'lawbooks for mankind' would mean in practice. Islamic history shows that after conquering foreign countries, Muslim scholars worked for many, many, indeed centuries, to develop a system of law based on their scriptures. The process is not easy, not quick, and certainly not 'abundantly clear' in actual practice. Seeking to unpack, to understand more precisely what Prabhupada meant is not frivolous, offensive, or a waste of time, since the most general sense of his words cannot be practical. Therefore, we must try to grasp the practical sense. History clearly shows that deriving legal systems from the theology of saints is a very difficult, complicated process. I add the caveat that I continue to place more importance on Prabhupada statements that he chose to place in the public sphere, rather than privately speak

to a few disciples ... Further, Prabhupada allegedly stated that he was writing lawbooks for humanity, not merely for ISKCON. This claim immediately raises immense practical issues that must be clearly seen and dealt with. That was my point. Indeed, I too take Prabhupada's alleged statement seriously. I am not satisfied merely to glorify Prabhupada, but I consider real, practical issues in implementation. But I suppose that is offensive in the minds of some.

Your servant, Hridayananda das Goswami

"For *karma-kāṇḍa* there are eighty authorized scriptures, such as *Manu-saṁhitā*, which are known as *dharma-śāstras* … actually it is a fact that one who does not take to devotional service must follow the decision of these scriptures."

— SB 6.1.7. purport